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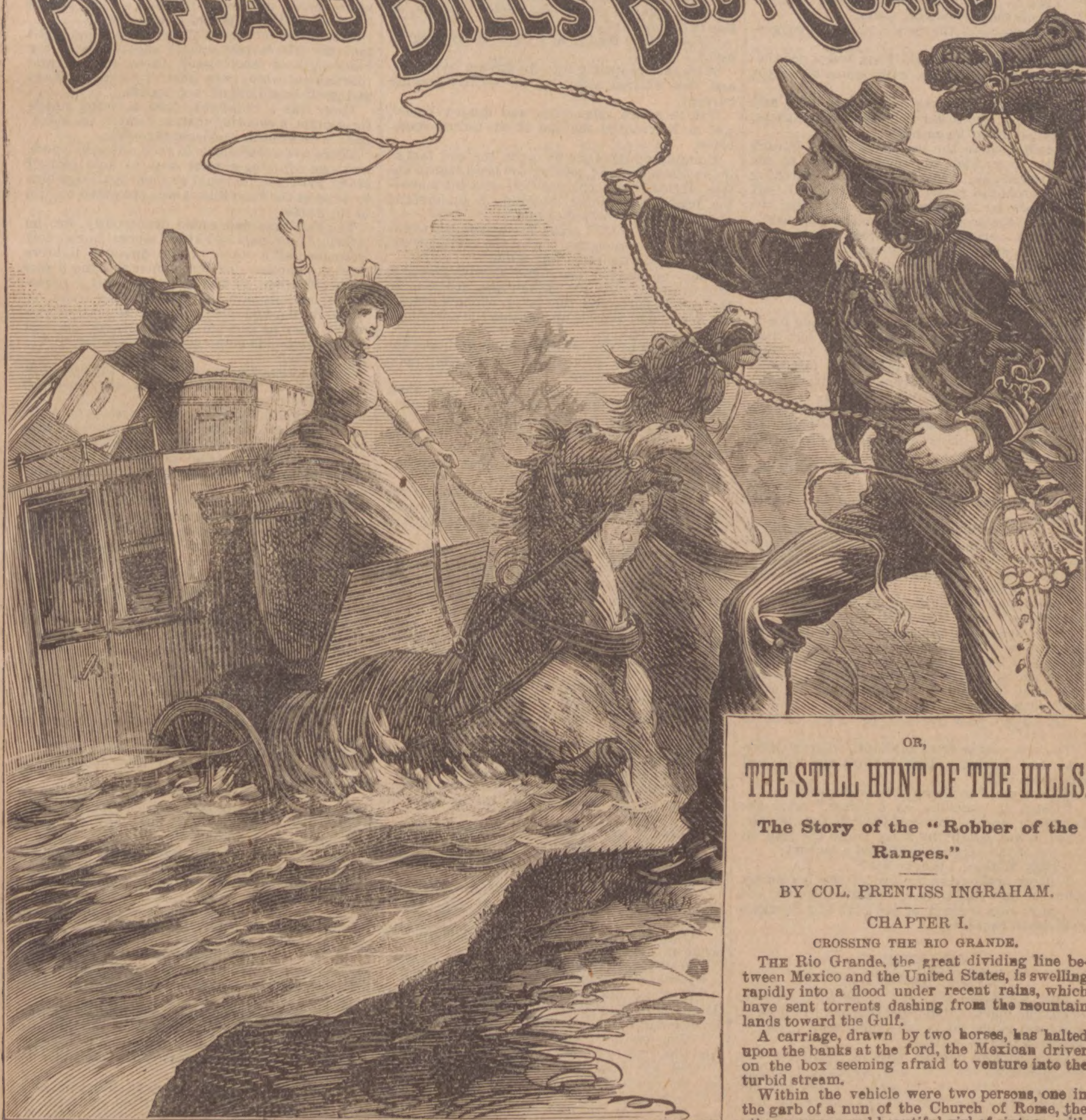
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## BUFFALO BILL'S BODY GUARD



OR,

### THE STILL HUNT OF THE HILLS.

The Story of the "Robber of the  
Ranges."

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

#### CHAPTER I.

##### CROSSING THE RIO GRANDE.

THE Rio Grande, the great dividing line between Mexico and the United States, is swelling rapidly into a flood under recent rains, which have sent torrents dashing from the mountain lands toward the Gulf.

A carriage, drawn by two horses, has halted upon the banks at the ford, the Mexican driver on the box seeming afraid to venture into the turbid stream.

Within the vehicle were two persons, one in the garb of a nun of the Church of Rome, the other a young and beautiful girl of sixteen, with the dark hair and glorious eyes that revealed her Spanish blood.

"CATCH IT, SENORITA AS I THROW," CRIED THE HORSEMAN, AND HE LAUNCHED THE COIL INTO THE AIR, WHEN IT WAS CAUGHT BY NINA.



"Well, Pedro, why do you halt here?" asked the nun, of the driver.

"It is dangerous to cross, Sister Felicite, with this stage of water," was the answer.

"And the river is rising?"

"It is, sister."

"You know the ford, Pedro?"

"Perfectly, sister."

"How deep will the waters come?"

"They will wash through the carriage, Sister Felicite."

"Then, what is to be done, Pedro?"

"Alas! I know not," was the dejected reply.

"If you return, the road is dangerous, night is coming on, and there is no ranch within fifteen miles."

"Very true, sister."

"What shall we do, then?" the nun asked, anxiously.

"Place greater weights in the carriage, sister, open the doors to let the water run through, and not wash it away, let me mount the box with Pedro, to use the whip, while he manages the horses, and we can get across."

The speaker was the young girl, and the nun looked at her with an expression of amazed horror.

"Why, child, what do you mean?"

"Oh, Sister Felicite, I do not mind a ducking or danger, for I have crossed many a stream beyond its banks."

"The senorita is right, Sister Felicite, for it is our only chance," Pedro said.

"And the river is constantly rising, so that there is no time to delay," Nina De Sutro remarked, in a determined manner, her face full of spirit and courage.

"What do you think, Pedro?" asked the nun.

"It is all that we can do, sister."

"Then act upon the Senorita Nina's suggestion at once."

The driver sprang from his box and at once began to pack the vehicle with stones to weight it down.

The baggage was taken from the boot and placed on top, and Sister Felicite mounted there, also, seated upon the cushions.

Nina climbed to the seat next to the driver's upon the box; then the man mounted to his place, seized his reins and with a searching glance across the river, to where the trail left the waters on the other shore, he urged the horses into the now turbulent and deep stream.

It was a perilous undertaking, but the nun was silent and calm, the young girl fearless-faced and determined, the driver, Pedro, seeming anxious and nervous, understanding the danger more thoroughly, perhaps with a premonition of what lay in their path.

The carriage at times was swept along for a few feet; the horses time and again lost their footing, but the brave driver knew the ford well, and Nina De Sutro understood just when to use the whip, for every movement of Pedro and the horses she carefully watched.

As they neared the other shore one of the horses suddenly sunk out of sight into a hole and the pull dragged the driver over upon the top of his now struggling team.

The vehicle swept around suddenly; the driver was beaten down by the plunging, struggling horses, and was swept away upon the surging current.

But Nina De Sutro had seized the reins, and to her great delight the vehicle was swept upon a bar where its downward course was arrested, and the horses regained their footing once more.

"Poor Pedro!"

"Alas! we, too, must go to join him soon," said Sister Felicite with calm resignation.

"Yes, sister, the waters are flowing more rapidly and we will soon be swept away," was the response of the young girl, who was still cool and full of nerve, though her face had blanched at thus being confronted by what appeared to be sure death.

"Keep up your courage, for I will come to your aid!"

The voice came from the bank, where a horseman had suddenly dashed down the hill and come to a halt.

"I will see if my lasso will reach you."

"Catch it, senorita, as I throw," cried the horseman, and he launched the coil into the air, when it was caught by Nina, while the nun on the top of the carriage muttered a fervent:

"Holy Mother, I thank thee!"

A cheer broke from the lips of the horseman, who was now seen to be splendidly mounted and equipped and dressed in the garb of a Mexican gentleman ranchero.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE RESCUER.

THE horseman who had come to the rescue of the nun and the young girl in their deadly peril, had been riding along the ridge trail upon the Mexican side of the river.

He saw their danger, just as the driver was dragged from his seat, and, wheeling his horse, he dashed down to the bank to see that the vehicle was at the mercy of the waters and very soon would be swept away with its occupants.

At once he had seized the long lariat he had hanging from the horn of his saddle.

He was a man to see and remember, one whose handsome face and courtly manners would win admiration anywhere.

His fine physique was set off by his elegant Mexican dress, and he wore upon his head a sombrero richly embroidered in gold and silver, a tiny crossed American and Mexican flag being upon the brim on the left side.

His hair was very long, falling far down his back, and he wore a mustache and imperial which gave him a military air.

His horse was richly caparisoned, and, a superior animal, it looked ready for any service its master demanded.

His lasso coil having been most skillfully launched over the waters and caught by Nina De Sutro, the horseman called out in a voice of command:

"Tie a firm knot about the dash of the carriage, and I will make fast my end to this tree."

The girl obeyed with alacrity, and, dismounting, the man took his stake-ropes and throwing aside his hat, jacket, belt of arms and boots with heavy spurs, plunged into the stream, and was, with a few vigorous strokes, carried to the vehicle, which was just balancing upon the bar of sand, the horses also barely keeping their feet.

The stake-ropes of the horses were taken from the boot and tied securely to the one carried by the rescuer. The new line was then made fast to the pole, the stranger meanwhile acting rapidly and coolly, while he said:

"Have no fear now, ladies, for I will swim ashore with this line, attach it to my saddle and my horse will drag yours and the carriage ashore."

"You, miss, hold the reins, but cling to the carriage top-rail should the vehicle capsize, as this lady must also do."

"Now, all is ready, and there is no time to lose."

With this he sprang into the stream once more and was whirled away by the swiftly flowing current.

But, he swam splendidly, and landed below, just as he reached the end of the united stake-ropes.

Running up the bank he made the end fast to his saddle-horn, and, seizing the lasso tied to the tree, untied it and took position near his horse—the intelligent animal seeming to understand just what was expected of him.

"All ready now!" cried the horseman, to the nun and Nina upon the box of the carriage, the latter holding the reins and whip.

Then he started his horse slowly forward, thus drawing, with the stake-ropes attached to the saddle-horn, and the lasso which he held, the horses and vehicle up against the current of the surging stream.

At the call of the stranger Nina gathered the reins, and at the same time laid the whip upon the backs of the horses.

They plunged forward and were over their depth at once, while the carriage sunk nearly to the top, the waters dashing through the doors which had been opened wide and thus made fast.

This alone saved the carriage from being upset by the pressure of the waters.

The noble horse ashore drew hard, and the rescuer also pulled with all his might, the lasso and stake-ropes, fast to the pole and dashboard being taut as a wire.

As the horses and vehicle swept off of the bar they swung toward the shore, and, after a moment of intense suspense to the nun and Nina, they beheld the team gain a footing; then the carriage began to rise from the stream, and a moment after, the stranger plunged in, seized the bits of the animals and led them a hundred feet up the current to the ford, where a landing could be made.

A moment more and the panting horses had dragged the dripping vehicle out of danger, while the stranger gave a shout of delight and cried:

"Saved, and only a foot wet."

"Yes, sir, you have saved this child's life and mine, and Heaven will reward you for it."

"But, alas! poor Pedro has gone to his doom. May the blessed Mother have mercy upon his soul!"

"Amen!" came the low, but fervent response of the young girl, and holding out her hand to the stranger she said in a frank manner natural to her:

"You have saved Sister Felicite and poor little me from death, and without your aid we were doomed."

"Oh, senor! never will I forget you, and the scene of this day."

The stranger bowed courteously and replied:

"It was my fortune to be near to aid you."

"Now, let me drive you to the Mission San Jose, where I suppose you are to pass the night," for it is but a mile away."

"You are most kind, sir; but, do not let me lead you from your way, for if so, I can drive."

"No, the road is bad and dangerous, and I will see you to safety before I leave you."

The baggage was then taken from the top, and placed in the boot again, the nun entered the carriage, Nina retaining her seat upon the box, seeming not to hear the good Felicite's

gentle command for her to sit with her, and, springing to his seat, the stranger called to his horse to follow, and drove off with the skill of an experienced driver.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE UNKNOWN CAVALIER.

THE Mission San Jose was reached in safety, and there the stranger left them, but Nina De Sutro never forgot that ride, or the face of the man who had saved her life.

Without a word regarding himself, not even giving his name or calling, the daring rescuer of two lives had sprung into his saddle, after reaching the Mission, raised his sombrero courteously, and dashing spurs into his horse, had gone off like the wind.

"Who is he, Father Ambrose?" asked the nun, addressing the head priest of the Mission.

"I do not know, Sister Felicite, for I never saw him before; but he shall have the prayers of the Church for his noble deed done this day for you and this child," was the response, and the travelers were made comfortable at the Mission for the night.

The next day another driver was secured, and Sister Felicite and her fair young charge, who was going to the City of Mexico, to a convent, to receive her education, went on their way.

But, Sister Felicite soon discovered that the peril through which they had passed, had seemed to cast a gloom upon the heart of Nina De Sutro.

The young girl became thoughtful, no longer gathered wild-flowers when they halted to rest by the wayside, and seemed to wish to commune with her own thoughts.

Arriving at the convent Nina did not have the same merry nature as before, and her leisure hours seemed to be passed in reveries.

After some months at the convent, Nina went into the city to pass a short vacation with her kindred, and accompany them to a grand tournament which was given by army officers and gentlemen fond of such sports.

There was a bull-fight, then a riding-match for a prize, a shooting-match, combat on horseback with swords, and lasso-throwing.

There were champions in each different sport, and one winning a prize was to hold himself ready to defend it should any one challenge him to do so at the time that it was presented to him in the arena.

The bull-fight had ended disastrously, for the infuriated animals had killed several horses and wounded half a dozen of the amateur fighters until not another one dared enter the ring it was supposed, when, to the surprise of all, a horseman splendidly mounted rode into the arena.

He was masked and wore the richest of costumes, who he was no one knew, and he had merely given his name as the "Cavalier of the Rio Grande."

The maddened bull made a rush for him that caused all to hold their breath with suspense to note the result.

Just as all believed the horse would be gored to death, the skillful rider wheeled him out of harm's way, spurred him alongside of the bull, and, leaning from his saddle, drove his sword to the hilt into the great brute's brawny side.

The games were then continued, and, just as the victor in the shooting-match was receiving his prize, in rode the stranger, still wearing his mask, and challenged him to contest for the trophy he had won.

The victor gladly consented, but only to surrender, soon after, the beautiful prize to the unknown Cavalier of the Rio Grande!

And, so it was with the one who had gained the prize for riding, a horse, saddle and bridle of great value, for the unknown was on hand to challenge him, and with the end of the trial he had vanquished the victorious champion!

In the combat on horseback with swords, the unknown was there to grasp the prize won by the victor as soon as he went forward to receive it.

Then came the sports with the lasso, and once more it was the Unknown who defeated the champion!

In addition to the prize—a purse of gold in this case—was a silk lasso presented, one beautifully woven of crimson hue, and, of great strength, length and beauty.

The last test of skill was a sword combat, fought with rapiers, and it was said that the gallant young officer who won the prize had no equal in Mexico.

But, into the arena rode the Unknown, and dismounting, he threw his glove down at the feet of the champion.

It was promptly picked up by the victor, who was the commander of a crack command of Lancers and the two soon advanced to face each other.

Like fiery serpents the steel blades writhed around each other and flashed in the sunlight, and men, and women too, had begun to feel that at last the Unknown had more than met his match.

"The Unknown was a fool to offer combat to Major Delano, after being tired out with his other combats," said a rich banker, the kinsman of Nina De Sutro.



Through all the young girl had watched with white face every contest, her eyes riveted upon the masked face of the Unknown; but she caught the words of her kinsman and said quickly:

"A hundred pesos, señor, that the Unknown defeats Major Delano."

"Bravo! just hear the child!"

"But, I accept your wager, Nina, and—Holy Heaven! see there!"

A cry of bravo went up from the crowd, for somehow the major was seen to catch the point of the Unknown's sword, and it pierced his heart.

How it happened no one seemed to know, and the explanation of the Unknown was accepted, for instantly unmasking himself, he faced the judges and said in a voice that reached every ear:

"Pardon, señors, but the officer was so confident of disarming me he pressed forward, slipped, and not guarding my thrust, my sword pierced his breast."

He bowed his head to await the decision of the judges, while from the lips of Nina De Sutro fell the words in a quivering voice:

"I felt that it was so."

"He is my Hero of the Rio Grande!"

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### DESERTED.

A YEAR after the fatal tournament in the City of Mexico, a grand masquerade ball was being held in a *salon* in New Orleans, and thither had gathered the beauty and the chivalry of the Crescent City.

Among the cavaliers present who had attracted most attention by his elegance of form and gorgeous attire was one in Mexican costume.

He had flirted with many of the fair belles, and was always in demand for a waltz, so gracefully did he dance, and a favored maiden present was envied by all the others as the Mexican seemed to devote more of his attention to her than to any one else present.

At last he said to her:

"Though unknown to you, *senorita*—"

"How do you know that I am a *senorita*?" was the low query, in the sweetest of voices.

"My heart tells me that you have never loved, that you are not a wife, for I believe you are scarcely eighteen; but though unknown to you let me beg that you take a stroll with me in the moonlight."

"Will you go?"

"Yes."

The word was hardly audible, but the Mexican drew the tiny hand into his arm and led her from the *salon*, out upon the piazza and thence into the moonlit garden, halting at an arbor.

"Do you know that I can tell who you are, *senorita*?" the man asked.

He saw the start that she gave at his words, and then she asked:

"Who am I?"

"The beautiful Miss De Latour, whom all the men in the city are wildly in love with."

"How do you know?"

"Because, from the first moment I saw you I loved you, and I have time and again sought to win a glance from you, and only yesterday did you favor me with a smile as I rode by your house, or was I mistaken, and the smile but the reflex of some pleasant thought?"

"*Senor* Marvin you are mistaken, for I am not Celeste De Latour, the loveliest and richest girl in the city."

"Not Miss De Latour?"

"Surely you are not deceiving me?"

"No, you are deceiving me, *senor*, in telling another that you love her, for I am your wife, *Austin Marvin*."

With dexterous hand she unmasked the man and herself at the same instant, revealing the faces of the Cavalier of the Rio Grande and Nina De Sutro.

"My God! Nina, you here?" gasped the man, his face turning livid in the moonlight.

"Yes, *Austin Marvin*, I am here on your track."

"I loved you, my hero among men, with all my heart and soul."

"Believing you an honorable man I fled from the convent with you to become your wife, though a mere girl."

"After a few short months you tired of me, because you knew that I would not get my fortune for years, until I was twenty-one."

"Then you deserted me in a strange land; but I followed you after reading your cruel note, and I have found you here after a long and weary search, here, breathing words of love, as you supposed, to another woman."

"But *Austin*, my husband, I will forgive all if you will go with me from here, for in a few short years I will be in possession of my riches."

Quickly came the answer of the man:

"You have conquered, Nina, and if you will forgive me I will go with you."

"Come, for I forgive all," was the happy answer.

And yet the man was treacherous, and intended so to be, for one week after Nina De Sutro wrote the following letter, addressed to an army officer who was her guardian and who had married her kinswoman:

"I have given you great distress of mind and heart, and yet love was my guide and I believed I acted for the right in leaving the convent to wed the man whom I met under strange circumstances and who once more crossed my path to command me as he might a slave."

"I have lived in a few short months my romance, burned the candle to the end, and am a deserted wife, finding that I married one who was a villain, one who sought me alone for my riches and finding that I could not, until twenty-one years of age, control my fortune, fled from me, leaving me alone in a strange city."

"I tracked him, found him making love to another, forgave him all, and lo! once more he deserted me, this time taking my money and my jewels, and in my despair I wish to hide the grave in my heart from all eyes except to you, to whom I now make this confession, and to the Mother Superior of the convent to whom I shall at once return, begging her to receive me once more as a pupil, as my elopement was not known, it being said that I had been called suddenly home to the United States."

"She will take me back, for well I know her kind heart, and when I have finished my education, if you my sweet cousin will allow me, I will come to you, still known as Nina De Sutro—your name, which as my guardian you gave to me, for I wish not to have the world know of my unhappy wedded life and the sorrow I have brought upon myself."

"As for the man who was my husband, I will not care what his fate may be, nor will I breathe his name even to you or the Mother Superior, for my past of misfortune, my dream of bliss that ended almost in despair, shall be as a sealed book."

There was more than this in the letter, which was addressed to an officer of the United States Army, who was stationed at a frontier post of the Northwest.

And back to the convent went the unhappy girl, made her confession, was forgiven and received as before, for the good Mother Felicité, the superioress, loved her as her own child, and wept bitter tears of regret when two years after she finished her school days and went to join her guardian and his wife in the United States.

#### CHAPTER V.

##### SILK LASSO SAM, THE OUTLAW.

THE coach on a branch of the Overland Stage Trail, with its terminus at Pioneer Post, was upon its way to its destination, with an extra hand known as Ribbons upon the box, Horseshoe Ned, the regular driver, being laid up for a short while.

It had reached a part of the trail where there was a steep and rugged descent to the bed of a swiftly flowing stream known as Deep Dell Brook, and Ribbons had brought the team of six horses to a halt for a short rest and a cooling draught of water.

There was a steep ascent upon the other side of the brook, with rocky cliffs some thirty feet in height upon either side for a few hundred yards.

Ribbons, the driver, was a good hand with the reins, a bold fellow and one who did not shrink from driving the Overland trails no matter what the danger might be.

He was seated upon his box with the air of one who felt that a few hours more would give him rest, when suddenly a man rode down into the trail ahead of him, and two faces peered over the rocky cliff, their eyes glancing along the barrels of their rifles.

"Hands up, Ribbons, or take the consequences," said the horseman riding toward the stage, and at the same time the men on the cliff covered the driver with their rifles.

"Pilgrims, we is in fer it?" cried Ribbons, turning to the window of the coach, and a voice quickly answered:

"Road-agents, eh?"

"Well, I fight."

With this the speaker leveled his revolver at one of the men on the cliff, and pulled trigger.

The man leaped to his feet, and tottering, fell into the road below, while his companion on the other cliff fired a shot into the coach.

At the same moment the horseman shouted:

"Hal! that is your game, is it, Ribbons?"

With his words he pulled trigger, and the driver sunk back dead on his seat.

"Ho, men, head off this coach and I'll see who this gamecock is who dares fire upon Silk Lasso Sam and his band," and the horseman spurred toward the coach, when several shots rang out of the window, one of which dropped his horse, and another wounded him in the shoulder.

The highwayman returned the fire, just as a mounted man came rapidly to his aid, and riddled the coach with bullets, though the plucky defender inside fired again, this time wounding the horse ridden by the outlaw coming to the aid of his chief.

The animal fell heavily, but the rider caught upon his feet and sprung to one side the coach, while his chief threw the door open upon the other.

"It's over with him, so we have nothing to fear now," said the chief, as he saw the form of the defender of the coach lying all in a heap, and his life ebbing rapidly away, from the wounds he had received at the hands of the outlaws.

"Frank dead, one horse ditto, and another

dying, so the old coach should pan out well to repay us, Pat," said the chief, and he added:

"Not to speak of my own wound, but which amounts to little."

He drew the body of the brave passenger from the coach as he spoke, and with deft hands, as though long experienced in such work, went through his search for booty.

A well-filled purse, some jewelry, a watch and chain, and a wallet of papers, were what he found, and quickly the outlaw chief looked them over.

Then he stood for some time lost in a deep reverie, as though with little fear of danger to himself there, until suddenly he broke out with the words:

"By Heaven, but I'll risk it!"

"Yes, if I hang for it, I will."

"Do what, sir?" asked his companion.

"Pat, I am going to play a bold game for gold, for I shall go to the fort, and you are to help me out."

"Go to the fort, sir?" asked the amazed man.

"Yes, I shall go as a passenger in Ribbons's coach, one who fired upon the road-agents and was wounded, and afterward was robbed."

"Quick, get me the clothes off that man and help me to disguise myself—yes, here is a dressing-case belonging to him, and I will soon have off my beard and mustache."

"Then I will place the body of the passenger in the coach in another of his suits of clothes, for he traveled well supplied, and Frank can be left where he fell, for they will send back to the scene of the hold-up when I reach the fort."

"Ah, captain, you have clean lost your senses."

"Not a bit of it, Pat, for I see a chance to visit the fort without the slightest damage, and there is one there whom I wish particularly to see, for it means big money for me."

And all this while the daring man was making his toilet, having quickly shaved off his mustache and imperial.

"Now, Pat, stand there and empty a couple of revolvers into the coach, and then you get Frank's horse, take that dead man's luggage, and go to the retreat, but say nothing of where I am, or when to expect me back, only do you keep in Spy's Canyon to be ready to meet me, or a messenger I may send there."

"Now I am ready, and do you get off at once, for a body of cavalry might happen along this way."

And mounting the box, where the dead Ribbons still lay, after a few more words of instructions to his man, the outlaw chief drove on up the hill, holding the reins like one who was a skilled driver.

His outlaw companion followed a moment after, with the luggage of the dead passenger, leaving his dead comrade and the horses lying in the trail.

Half an hour after the coach had rolled away a horseman came dashing upon the scene and drew rein.

The horseman was Buffalo Bill, the King of Scouts, and he cried sternly:

"This is Silk Lasso Sam's work."

#### CHAPTER VI.

##### BONNIE BELLE OF POCKET CITY.

OF all strange camps and communities ever seen upon the frontier, that of Pocket City in Yellow Dust Valley was the strangest.

It was named from the fact that it fitted into the valley among the mountains like a pocket in a dress, and also on account perhaps of there having been found just there a number of rich pockets of gold.

Yellow Dust Valley was a home of miners, a couple or more thousand being scattered along the sides of the mountains, and Pocket City, situated near the upper end, was the headquarters of all.

There the stage line had its ending and there was a semi-monthly coach from Pocket City to the main stem of the Overland Trail.

There was a post-office, a hotel known as The Frying Pan, a saloon and gambling resort called the Devil's Den, several stores, a combination blacksmith and wagon-shop, with smaller drinking and betting places and several boarding-houses.

Perhaps half a score of women were to be found in Pocket City with double that number of children, and well for the fair sex was it that it was so, for the camps were the resort of a very wild element of humanity, varying from honest men to horse-thieves, road-agents, gold-grabbers and desperadoes of the very worst type.

The most prominent person in Pocket City was a woman, or rather a young girl, because she could scarcely be over nineteen.

She had arrived in Pocket City one day in a coach which had been held up, and had defended herself so well, that she had shot one of the robbers dead and enabled the driver to get away.

The "big man" of Pocket City was in that coach, returning from the East, and he had received a mortal wound, and was so tenderly cared for by the young girl in question that upon arriving at his home he had told her frankly that he would make her his heiress, as he had no one to claim his riches.



And so it was that Bonnie Belle, as he had called her after a daughter who had died years before, became the postmistress, stage-agent, landlady of The Frying Pan Hotel and of the Devil's Den.

What had brought the young girl to Pocket City no one knew; but Landlord Lazarus had not been in his grave a day, before the rough element discovered that the mistress of The Frying Pan intended to be the master there.

She made the hotel a success, would have no cheating in her gambling saloon, sold only the best of liquors, stood no nonsense from any of the men and was treated with marked respect.

She was a beautiful creature too, with a mass of red-gold hair, large, lustrous black eyes full of a dreamy sadness, perfect features and a form of exquisite grace.

She was wont to dress neatly about the hotel and in attending to her other duties there, and when out for a ride on one of her spirited horses, wore a buckskin habit and gold-embroidered sombrero.

When visiting her gambling saloon at night she wore velvet or silk and jewels.

Kind to all, with charity for men's failings and sins, and generosity toward all in suffering and distress, Bonnie Belle had won the hearts of all the miners as well as their admiration and respect.

Not the most hardened villain in the camp would have dared say aught to cast a slur upon Bonnie Belle if he valued his life, for he would have been seized and made an example of very quickly.

Many a poor sick miner had been sent to his home by her, and she was ever ready to lend aid and do an act of mercy.

If a man was hungry and had no money, he got food at The Frying Pan freely.

If a miner was sick, some delicacy was sent him from Bonnie Belle's table.

It was not a wonder then that some grateful miner had called her the Beautiful Samaritan.

What had brought her to the Wild West, unless to do good, no one could understand, and men wondered and marveled over and over the strange fact of such a refined being seeking a home amid such rude surroundings.

One wing of The Frying Pan Bonnie Belle had fitted up for her especial use.

It was surrounded by a high stockade wall, taking in an acre of land, and where there was a spring, rustic arbor, hammock and flowers.

There was no way of entering this garden spot save through her rooms in the hotel, in the wing referred to, and which were five in number, an office, sitting-room, dining-room and two bedrooms.

There was a piazza running around the wing, and she certainly was most comfortable in her border home.

She had Chinese servants and kept the place as neat as possible, while she kept hunters out to supply the table with game, had a large chicken yard and garden, and having no bar connected with the hotel, managed to keep an orderly home for her boarders, who were numerous.

Having presented Bonnie Belle to the reader, it will be well in the next chapter to make known the causes which had induced such a woman to seek a home beyond the borders of civilization.

## CHAPTER VII.

### A SISTER OF AN OUTLAW.

BONNIE BELLE was in the gambling-saloon of Devil's Den.

The saloon was in full blast, for the bar across one end was crowded with drinkers, the farobank, roulette-table, *rouge et noir* and games of dice were going with plenty of players about them, and a score or more tables had men at them, gambling with cards.

There was a dense atmosphere of smoke in the vast saloon, and with the clinking of glasses, rattling of dice, shuffling of cards and hum of conversation, in which there was some sudden burst of profanity now and then, the place was one to be seen and never forgotten.

Quietly Bonnie Belle entered the saloon from a side-door, and as soon as she was discovered a hush, like a wave swept over the crowd of three or four hundred men present.

No better mark of respect could have been shown her than this, and the man that uttered an oath while she was present would have found himself covered by a score of "guns" instantly, until he made ample apology for his offense.

Speaking pleasantly here and there Bonnie Belle made the tour of the gaming-tables, all of which made a commission upon all money put up, but the dealers were not allowed to bet against the players, and any trickery quickly ended a man's position of trust in the Devil's Den, for as a miner expressed it:

"Bonnie Belle are squar' all round."

And this she certainly was, square in all her dealings.

Suddenly, as she made the rounds of the tables she came face to face with a man who had just entered the Devil's Den.

He was dressed in miner's garb, and was a

commanding looking man with a handsome full bearded face and wearing his hair long.

His look was that of a man reared in refinement, and his manners, as he spoke to various of those whom he passed, were courtly and gentle.

"Ah, Deadshot Dean, I am glad to see you."

"Do you play to-night?" and Bonnie Belle held forth her hand, which the man grasped warmly, while he doffed his hat as he replied:

"No, Bonnie Belle, I merely looked in for a moment."

"Is it too late to get some supper at The Frying Pan?"

"No, I will go over at once and order it," and she passed on, leaving the saloon by the rear door by which she had entered, and which led along a stockade lane at the base of the mountain range to her own quarters.

The man addressed as Deadshot Dean quietly made the tour of the room, and it was evident from the greetings bestowed upon him and the attention he attracted that he was no ordinary personage.

He had come to the mines some years before to work a claim for which he brought papers giving him all right and title thereto, and he had worked with varying success ever since.

He was known as the Miner of Hangman's Gulch, as his cabin was isolated and near a spot where all the hangings in Yellow Dust Valley were held.

No other cabin was within a mile and a half of him, for the superstitious miners would not seek claims within a mile limit of Hangman's Gulch, which was regarded by many as haunted and was looked upon by all as a place accursed.

His home was situated upon a spur around the base of which wound a trail, and his claim was an eighth of a mile distant from his cabin.

Generous to all, peaceful in his nature, but a dangerous man to arouse, he had won his name of Deadshot Dean by defending himself against half a dozen desperadoes on one occasion, and since then had shown himself to be a man of courage and determination which no peril could subdue.

Leaving the Devil's Den the miner had gone directly to The Frying Pan and Bonnie Belle met him at the office and said:

"I have ordered your supper brought to my dining-room, Deadshot Dean, so come in here, for I know that you have news for me."

"I have, indeed, Bonnie Belle," was the answer.

"When did you get back?"

"To-night."

"I came by my cabin but would not stop to get supper, for I was anxious to see you to-night."

"You went to the fort?"

"I did, but following the trail of that map, found in the room of the gambler whom I was forced to kill, I met Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell on the war-path, and guided them, with a party of soldiers, to the retreat of the outlaws."

"And captured them?"

"Yes, or killed them."

"And Silk Lasso Sam?" quickly asked the woman, her face showing intense anxiety as she asked the question.

"Was captured."

"And where is he now?"

"A prisoner at Pioneer Post."

"He will be hanged, of course?"

"Yes, for his crimes are many, as you know, and he was immediately sentenced, before I left the fort, to die upon the gallows along with his men who had been captured."

"Alas! my poor, sinful brother, he deserves the shameful fate that he is to meet, and which I have in vain striven hard to save him from," and the tears came into the beautiful eyes of Bonnie Belle, while Deadshot Dean said:

"You have been a most devoted sister, Bonnie Belle, to that man, and his fate he has brought upon his own head; but, let me tell you all that has happened since I left here to track Silk Lasso Sam and his band to their lair."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE MINER'S STORY.

"BONNIE BELLE, for I must continue to call you by the name you are known by to the miners, and not by that of Ruth Leigh, as I knew you in the years gone by, when you were a little girl, I—"

"Yes, call me Bonnie Belle, Carrol Dean," she said sadly:

"Then, Bonnie Belle, let me tell you that I deem the course you have pursued to check the career of your wicked brother all that you could do."

"You would have been his accomplice, though innocently, in his crimes, if you had allowed him to go on in his desperate deeds of lawlessness."

"I feel that, Carrol Dean; I know it."

"You know well that when your father, your brother and yourself lived in luxury upon your plantation home, that Arden was wild, wayward and dissipated."

"Alas, yes."

"He caused your father much of suffering, was dismissed from the navy, and had to leave the German University because he killed a fellow student, and your father's wealth and influence barely saved him from the gallows for taking another life."

"Then came his rivalry of me for the love of Kathleen Clyde, who is now my wife, and you remember how he shot me down in her presence, fled, believing he had killed me, and forging your father's name, secured a large sum from the bank and became a fugitive from justice?"

"Alas! I know all, Carrol Dean."

"You and your father, with sorrow in your hearts, went abroad, and his failing health brought you back to America, to ranch life in California."

"He died there, and then you sought the reformation of your wicked brother, seeking him in these wilds, where few other women would have, or could have, come as you have done."

"You found him at last in Silk Lasso Sam, the leader of an outlaw band, and failing to turn him from his wickedness, you did but right to let him go his way and raise no hand longer to save him."

"Fortunately I was driven to this land to make money, by digging in the old claim my father had bought, for now you have a friend, a brother in me, and you must do as I say."

"I will, I will."

"I did not seek the downfall of your brother through any feeling of revenge, but because I had been secretly made by Colonel Dunwoody of Pioneer Post, through having saved the life of Buffalo Bill, as you remember, a Secret Service Scout."

"I did not know, until you told me before my going, that Silk Lasso Sam was your brother, my old foe, and remembering you only as a girl just verging into your teens, I did not recognize Ruth Leigh in Bonnie Belle."

"I tracked your brother to his lair, and let me tell you of his latest villainy."

"Tell me all, for I wish nothing hidden from me," she said sadly.

"After visiting you here, he broke every pledge he had made you."

"He went with two followers to the Overland Trail to Pioneer Post, and lay in ambush until the coach came along, when he held it up."

"One plucky passenger opened fire, killing one of the outlaws, and slightly wounding the chief, whose horse also was shot under him."

"In retaliation the outlaws killed the driver and the passenger, and then the daring idea seized upon him to enter the fort."

"And he was captured?"

"Not then, for he played passenger, and was treated with the greatest kindness by all."

"Being in secret communication with his men, he arranged a plot to have a young lady there, Miss Clarice Carr, the belle of the fort, and himself captured by the band, intending to force from her a large ransom for her release."

"Little did she suspect his treachery and they were captured and taken to the secret retreat of the outlaws, one of whom pretended to be Silk Lasso Sam, the chief."

"Fortunately it was just then that I reached the trail and found Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell upon it with the soldiers."

"The map however enabled me to guide them there, and to Miss Carr's horror she discovered the perfidy of the man she had believed to be a gentleman."

"He denied the charges against him, but I made myself known to him and he said no more and was taken to the fort, tried and sentenced to die upon the gallows."

"My poor, unfortunate, erring brother," said Bonnie Belle sadly.

"Yes, it is a sad case, yet you have done far more than your duty to save him."

"I feel that I have sacrificed, I was going to say, my self-respect to do so."

"No, no, not that, for you are true as steel to yourself, even though you are what you are in this wild land."

"I feel that I am that."

"You are indeed, and your brother, whom I had an interview with, pledged his word not to make his relationship to you known, and begged that you would forgive and forget him."

"I will forgive, but I can never forget."

"He bade me also to tell you that you must let me be as a brother to you, that you must go with me to my home in the East, where you will find a sister in my wife, and be loved by her father and my child."

"Yes, Ruth, you must go with me, for I am going East to see my family, and then return here to work my mine, which I find is going to pay out rich."

"I will take you with me by the first stage, and when I return, if you will trust me, I will settle up your affairs in Pocket City as best I can for you, so do not refuse."

"Carrol Dean I will go with you and give up this wild life," was the low reply.

Two weeks after the east-bound stage carried as passengers Bonnie Belle and Deadshot Dean, the former believing that she was leaving the Wild West forever, and where her brother's life was soon to end in shame and suffering.



## CHAPTER IX.

## LIFE AT PIONEER POST.

PIONEER POST was a gem as a frontier post, for it was charmingly located upon a bluff overhanging a river, with sloping hills stretching down from the plateau on the summit to the plains below, and a vast expanse of scenery upon every side.

Strongly built, it was well armed and an ideal fort.

Many officers had their families there, and Colonel Dunwoody, the bachelor commandant, had a most hospitable staff, while he was ever ready to add to the enjoyment and comfort of those under his command.

He was a handsome man, who had been promoted from lieutenant up to the rank of colonel for services rendered in action, was a perfect soldier, a thorough disciplinarian, and though having the means to live in luxury in the fort, he yet was ready to put up with the greatest hardships in the field.

There was an officers' club in the fort, a ladies' club, and then with polo, lawn tennis, rowing on the river, hunting, riding and fishing parties, life passed most pleasantly to all, notwithstanding the fact that danger was constantly near, and the shadow of death often came into their midst.

The garrison was a large one, and there were numerous belles and beaux in the military family of the colonel.

There was one bachelor captain of cavalry, Dick Caruth, who was a general favorite with all and considered a fine *parti* by mothers with daughters in the matrimonial mart, for he was a very handsome, daring fellow, with a fortune and the hope of speedy promotion.

Lieutenant Vassar Turpin, the colonel's aide, was another catch, and in addition there were half a dozen more.

Among the ladies were two who were known as The Rivals, though one never admitted a rivalry between them.

One of these was Nina De Sutro, a Mexican maiden reared mostly in the United States, and who dwelt with her guardian and kinsman, Colonel Ravel De Sutro and his beautiful wife, who was also a native of the sunny land of Mexico.

It was no wonder that Nina De Sutro at twenty was a belle, for she was very beautiful, her form was perfection itself, and she was brilliant and accomplished, though perhaps a little too satirical and bitter at times.

Her rival was Clarice Carr, a young lady whom to know was to love, for she was as popular with her own sex as with the men.

Those who made comparisons between Nina De Sutro and Clarice Carr were wont to decide almost invariably that the latter was the loveliest woman of the two.

She was highly accomplished, having passed much of her life abroad, was an artist, songstress and musician as well, while few men durst follow her lead when mounted.

With a very large fortune under her control she preferred to live with her old schoolmate and relative, Mrs. Lester, the wife of Major Lionel Lester, next officer in rank to Lieutenant Colonel De Sutro at the fort.

"I love the free life of these Western wilds far more than all the gayeties of metropolitan life," she was wont to say, and there was little doubt but that she spoke the truth.

Thus far neither Clarice Carr or Nina De Sutro had been won by any of their numerous lovers, and they were numerous, and men began to fear that they had both taken secret vows to become old maids.

If a rivalry existed between the two it was Nina, not Clarice that revealed it, for the latter appeared to know no rival and to live for others rather more than herself.

She admired Nina De Sutro greatly, yet felt pained at times to hear her cut deeply when the opportunity offered, and often wound the one she gave the stinging rejoinder to, while, with a look, or smile she would call him again to her side.

"She is a sad coquette, or heartless one perhaps, and cannot help it."

"At times I fear she has had some great sorrow to embitter her life, and if so I pity her and could never reproach."

So said Clarice Carr of Nina De Sutro to her confidante and devoted friend, Louise Lester.

"So I have thought, Clarice, and Lionel also suggested it, for she is all softness at times and again almost cruel toward her admirers," was Mrs. Lester's comment.

When Silk Lasso Sam, in his disguise as the wounded and passenger hero, Austin Marvin, had come to the fort, he had devoted himself at first to Nina De Sutro, and she claimed to have met him in Mexico, where he had saved her life.

But the secret of that meeting, the secret that was between them, she did not reveal and he dared not do so.

But soon after he turned his attention to Clarice Carr, and it ended, as the miner related to Bonnie Belle, in the leading of the maiden into a treacherous trap from which she would not have escaped without large ransom, but for

Deadshot Dean's tracking the outlaws to their lair with Buffalo Bill.

When the maiden was rescued, and the outlaws brought prisoners into camp, the excitement was intense, and disciplined soldiers though they were, there were mutterings of such intense hatred heard against Silk Lasso Sam that a double guard was placed about him.

That they had all been most cleverly taken in, every officer had to admit, though they could not but admire the magnificent nerve and daring of the outlaw chief who they realized was no ordinary man, and hope that an end would soon come to his many red deeds when he died on the gallows.

## CHAPTER X.

## THE LAST APPEAL.

THE coach out of Pocket City carried as passengers Carrol Dean and Bonnie Belle on their way East to the home of the miner.

Bonnie Belle did not say to her friends in Yellow Dust Valley that she would not return, for she feared that the result might be disastrous to her interests there.

She told them she was going East on an important mission, and her interests in Pocket City were left to the management of the one who held the position of clerk in The Frying Pan Hotel.

Deadshot Dean had written to his wife to expect him home soon, and that he would bring with him one whom she would also be glad to welcome.

The stage-trail from Pocket City led within forty miles of Pioneer Post, and led into the one from the fort at a point where there was a station with a corral of horses for the coaches and couriers.

It was while the coach was nearing this station that the driver heard the clatter of hoofs behind him and turning his head saw a horseman coming along at rapid speed after the coach.

His first thought was that he was a road-agent in chase, and his next that the man might be a courier bearing dispatches from the fort.

But the horseman soon overtook the coach and called out:

"Ho, driver, have you Bonnie Belle a passenger with you?"

"I has," was the reply of Sandy Gill, the driver, and he eyed the horseman curiously.

"Then I have a letter for her."

"A letter for me?" and Bonnie Belle looked out of the coach window with surprise at the man, who was dressed as an army courier, and was well mounted.

"Are you Bonnie Belle, miss?"

"Yes, I am so called."

"Of Yellow Dust Valley?"

"Yes, of Pocket City."

"I have a letter then for you, miss."

"Who has sent me a letter?"

"Its reading will tell you, miss."

"You are not from the Yellow Dust country?"

"No, miss, I am from the fort at Pioneer Post."

Bonnie Belle started at this and glanced at the miner.

"What does it mean?" she asked, seeming anxious not to touch the letter for some reason.

Thus approached the miner asked:

"Do you come from the fort, my man?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you were sent with a letter for Bonnie Belle?"

"I was, sir, and upon reaching Pocket City and learning that she had gone East by coach, I came on after her."

"Who is this letter from?"

"I do not know, sir; but, it was given to me by an officer at the fort with orders to place it in the hands of Miss Bonnie Belle with the greatest dispatch."

"Give me the letter," and Bonnie Belle held out her hand, which trembled as she read the address and seemed to recognize the writing.

"It is from—" and she said no more.

But Deadshot Dean recognized by her look of significance that she could only mean her brother, then a condemned prisoner at the fort.

She nerved herself to break the seal and asked:

"Is there an answer?"

"I was told that there was, miss."

At this the miner stepped out of the coach and left her to read the letter alone, for he saw that she was deeply affected.

When the miner, the courier and the stage-coach driver were talking together she opened the letter.

It was written in cipher, and she said:

"It is the alphabet which my poor brother taught me to write when I was a very little girl."

"He felt that I would remember it, and has written something he dared not let any other eye see, I suppose."

"Oh! if it should be an appeal to me to save him!"

She dashed the tears from her eyes and nerved herself to read the letter which she had seemed to dread so much.

It was as follows:

"MY DARLING SISTER:—

"Do you remember away back when you were a little girl of ten, and I was dismissed from the navy

that you said, when father and mother were cold toward me, that you would never desert me?"

"Do you recall again when I came home from Germany, dismissed from the university on account of the fatal duel I fought, you again were my little comforter?"

"So it has been through all, even when maddened with jealousy I sought the life of Carrol Dean, and to escape, took my father's money, you were the one to aid me secretly with funds and to cheer me with your loving letters."

"Every pledge I have made you I have ruthlessly broken, and I feel that you have utterly lost confidence in me."

"I have a friend in the fort who gets a messenger to carry this letter to you, and it is my last appeal, for through Carrol Dean you have heard that I am under sentence to die upon the gallows."

"Now I see my crimes in all their enormity, and I am not fit to die."

"I have repented, yet I would live to atone by good deeds for all the wicked ones I have been guilty of, and hence this my last, sad appeal to you, my loving, faithful sister."

"Whatever you attempt to do you can, I know, and I ask you to set me free that henceforth far from these scenes I may live a better life and atone for the past."

"Do I appeal in vain, my sister?"

"If no, send word by the messenger, simply:

"I will."

"If in vain, send simply:

"I will not."

"Feeling that I do not appeal in vain, believe me your unhappy brother,

"THE DOOMED OUTLAW."

## CHAPTER XI.

## THE RESPONSE.

OVER and over again did Ruth Leigh read this letter from her doomed brother.

He had struck the right chord in appealing to her as he did, for he admitted his guilt, and repenting, wished to live only for atonement for the past.

Bonnie Belle was deeply impressed by the letter.

Her brother had been her idol from her earliest girlhood, and she had condoned his sins, and hoped for his reformation in the end.

Had the reformation come at last?

It seemed so to her, and hence she decided to yield to this last appeal, to give him one more chance.

Then she called to the courier and said:

"Let me give you this for your trouble, so report that your services are paid for, please."

With this she placed in his hand a bill, which the miner saw had an L upon it.

"Thank you, kindly, miss. But the answer?"

"Is for you to report that I simply said:

"I will."

"Yes, miss, I will not forget it."

With this the courier turned away, mounted his horse and started back upon the trail, while Bonnie Belle said to the driver:

"You are very kind to delay so long for me, and I thank you, Sandy."

"Never mind the delay, Bonnie Belle, for I can make it up."

"Are you ready to go on, now?"

"Yes."

"Then jump aboard, Deadshot Dean, and I'll send the critters ahead lively."

The miner obeyed, and the coach rolled rapidly on its way.

For some time neither the driver or the maiden spoke.

He would not ask her the nature of the letter she had received, unless she chose to reveal it; yet he could guess that it came from her outlaw brother.

On her part she was wondering how she could confide her secret to Carrol Dean.

After awhile she decided that she could not tell him all, for it would be his duty to thwart her in her humane intention.

So she said:

"Carrol Dean, you have been as a dear good brother to me, and I hope that I may ever so regard you; but I fear that you will not approve of what I have decided to do."

"What is it, Bonnie Belle?"

"I have a letter from my brother."

"I guessed as much."

"It is written in cipher and was sent to me through some one in the fort who is friendly toward him."

"I hardly believe that possible, so bitter was the feeling toward him, and that he must be an ally of his in some way."

"That may be."

"But the appeal from him is a pleading one, and I have decided to see him."

"Do you mean it, Ruth Leigh?" asked the surprised miner.

"Yes."

"You are wrong in doing so, very."

"It may be that I am, but in this case I feel that I must see him."

"He is an outlaw, it is true."

"He has committed many crimes as Silk Lasso Sam the road-agent chief, and yet now he is down, ironed hands and feet, a prisoner at the mercy of his foes."

"He is under sentence of death and will soon be led upon the gallows to die at the end of a rope."



"He will have not one near to cheer his last moments, to breathe one kind word, to utter one word of forgiveness, and he will be thrown into a nameless grave."

"With all his sins weighing him down he is yet my brother."

"The same mother bore him that bore me, and our father loved him as dearly as he did me."

"True, I admit he broke the heart of my mother and his deeds hastened my father into his grave."

"But the same blood is in his veins that flows in mine, and I will not be a coward and desert him in his last moments."

"No, I sent him word that I would come to him, and I will."

The earnest argument of the maiden touched the miner deeply.

He realized just how she felt and suffered, and so said:

"I appreciate fully, Ruth, your position and your sorrow, and your kind heart does you credit; but in going to see your brother, to be with him in his last hours, to place him in the grave of a dishonored man, will not your sufferings but be increased?"

"They may be, and yet what will be my sufferings to his despair?"

"No, no, I shall go, Carrol Dean."

"I will not say a word against it."

"Shall we catch the next coach back?"

"No, for you are not to go."

"Do you expect me to leave you?"

"Yes, you must go to your family, and I will go back alone."

"I will go to Chicago and then turn back from there, and return to the fort."

"When I have done all in my power, Mr. Dean, for that stricken man, then I will come to your home in the East."

"Need I say more?"

"No, I will trust you; but I would gladly return with you and wait until all is over."

"That I cannot, will not allow."

"I must go alone," was the determined reply of Bonnie Belle, and the miner urged no more.

## CHAPTER XII.

### AN OLD FRIEND.

SEVERAL days after the reception of the letter by Bonnie Belle, a carriage drove up to the army headquarters in Chicago, and a lady wearing a heavy veil got out.

As she reached the reception-room she suddenly came face to face with the general's orderly, and throwing back her veil she extended her hand and said pleasantly and in a tone of surprise:

"Why, Bainbridge, you here?"

"As I live and move it's Bonnie Belle," cried the orderly, grasping the extended hand in both his own.

"Yes, Bainbridge, and I am glad to see you once more, though I did not know that you were a soldier."

"Yes, senor, I came home as you know, with a snug little fortune in gold, but I speculated and lost it, and some months ago when in hard luck here in Chicago, I stopped the horses of the general's carriage when they were running away, the driver having been thrown from the box, and the general and his wife were inside."

"He asked me what he could do for me, and I said that as I had a record as an old soldier I would enter the army again, and he made me his orderly and here I am, Bonnie Belle, and as glad a man as ever was to see your beautiful face again, for it takes me back to the mines, and the time you saved my life that night in Devil's Den."

"I'll never forget you for it, Bonnie Belle, for if you had not vouched for me that night the boys would have hanged me sure."

"They certainly would have done so, Bainbridge, and have been sorry for it the next day when they found out who the real criminal was."

"But is General S— in?"

"No, Bonnie Belle, he has gone out to lunch; but he will soon return, so walk into his private office and await his coming."

"Is no one there?"

"Not a soul at this hour, miss."

"I will go then."

She was led by the orderly into the private quarters of the general commanding, and as she halted near the desk she asked:

"Bainbridge, will you kindly get me a glass of water?"

The orderly promptly disappeared upon the errand and quickly Bonnie Belle stepped to the desk, glanced at something that caught her eye and thrust it beneath her veil.

"Who is the assistant adjutant-general, Bainbridge, on the general's staff?" she asked, casually, after drinking the water and thanking him for it.

The orderly told her and then the two had quite a long talk together before the officer referred to entered.

"A lady to see the general, sir, upon important business," said the orderly.

"Be seated, madam, for General S— will return very soon."

A moment after General S— entered and bowed as he saw a lady in waiting.

When she threw back her veil, revealing her beautiful face he seemed impressed and said with marked courtesy:

"How can I serve you, miss?"

"Permit me to ask you, general, if I can confide a secret to you and yet keep my name from you?"

"Certainly, if you wish."

"My mission then, sir, is one of sorrow to me, for I come to ask a favor of you."

"Of what tenor, miss?"

"There has been captured at Pioneer Post, a noted criminal, for he is an outlaw and road-agent, known as Silk Lasso Sam."

"Yes, I have word from Colonel Dunwoody of the fort, and that he has been sentenced to death for his crimes."

"Is this legal, general?"

"It is justice, and military law, for that prevails in that wild land of lawlessness."

"Suppose that he were already amenable to the civil laws for crimes committed, could he not be taken from the military prison for trial East?"

"That may be, yes, but I apprehend no such demand."

"Nor do I, sir, only I wished to know if I should appeal to the civil or the military for permission to see this condemned man and be with him in his last moments?"

"Ah! that is the situation is it, miss?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is this man to you?"

"All that I have in the world of near kindred, sir—my brother."

"Indeed?"

"You have my sympathy indeed, my dear lady."

"And is your sympathy deep enough, may I ask, to allow of your granting me the sight I ask, to go to this doomed brother of mine, be with him in his last hours, and when your military law has been satiated by his death, permit me to claim the body for burial?"

"Remember, I do not attempt to deny his crimes, or to palliate them in the slightest degree, for he deserves death for breaking the laws of his land as he has; but I do beg for this mercy for him, and for me, that you permit me to be with him in his last moments."

General S— was seen to bite his lips, and the adjutant had turned his gaze earnestly upon the fair pleader, for he too was impressed.

"My dear young lady, I will not deny you, I will grant your request."

"Colonel, write out an official order to Colonel Dunwoody to permit this lady to see her brother at will, and to turn over the body of the man to her after his execution."

"I thank you, sir, most sincerely," and the tears came into the beautiful eyes of the beautiful girl.

The order was written, signed and sealed, and both officers arose as Bonnie Belle took her leave, the general himself opening the door for her, while the orderly in the corridor escorted her to the carriage.

"Here is my address, Bainbridge, so call on me this evening, and do not say to any one that you know me."

"You can rely on me fully, Bonnie Belle," answered the orderly as he closed the door.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE DOOMED OUTLAW.

IN a cabin of stout logs, with floor and roof of the same solid material to make escape impossible, narrow apertures in either end for windows, and a door of heavy timber barred with iron, sat a man under the sentence of death.

Before his door, his beat being from corner to corner of the cabin, paced a sentinel on duty.

The cabin stood apart from the regular guard-house, and was so situated that all approaching and leaving it could readily be seen from the soldiers' barracks which it fronted.

The prisoner was heavily ironed with manacles about his ankles, and they were chained to the floor, though he had length enough to walk to the door and to his cot.

The man sat in an easy-chair facing the door, which was partially open, giving him a glimpse of the plains and mountains beyond.

The chair, a cot, table and some books were all that there was in the room to add to his comfort.

The face of the man though pale was not despairing, and upon it rested no look of anxiety though but too well he knew that there was no help for him, that he was doomed to die upon the gallows.

Dressed in border costume, clean shaven and neat in appearance, he looked almost contented with his lot.

The prisoner was none other than he whom the reader knows as the outlaw chief, Silk Lasso Sam, he who held up the coach and killed the driver and a passenger, afterward playing his game so boldly as Austin Marvin, and being received into the fort with every hospitality, until he could kidnap, with the aid of his band,

Miss Charlie Carr, to hold until she paid a large ransom for her release.

There were others of his band in the fort as prisoners, but these were kept apart, as the outlaw chief had asked to be alone.

He had faced his accusers at the trial without flinching, had not quailed under the gaze of those whom he had wronged, and had appeared really interested in the testimony given by Miss Carr, as to what he had done after their being captured by the men of his band.

When he arose to receive the sentence of the military tribunal he did not show the slightest sign of emotion, and some said that he even smiled serenely when the judge advocate told him that his doom was to be death upon the gallows.

From his position the prisoner was watching through his cabin door, the sun nearing the horizon.

Suddenly he started, for he saw an officer and a lady approaching his prison.

They drew nearer, the sentinel halted, faced them and came to a present, as the officer of the day said:

"Sentinel, you are to permit this lady to enter the cabin to visit the prisoner, and you are to walk your beat thirty paces from the cabin."

The door opened, then, to admit the lady, as the officer walked away, and the sentinel stepped off his thirty paces, so as to be out of hearing of what was said.

"Well, Nina, you have come?" said the prisoner, as he rose from his chair and motioned to her to sit down, while he took a seat upon his cot.

"Yes, at your bidding, for Colonel Dunwoody sent for me and said that you had certain things you wished done, and asked if you might not communicate them to me."

"What is it you would have me to do?"

The maiden spoke calmly and coldly.

The man smiled and replied:

"There is much that I would have you do."

"Let me know what it is?"

"I have a letter here, written, in cipher to one in Pocket City."

"It is most important that it should be delivered, for it concerns the happiness of more than one."

"Well?"

"You must see that it is delivered."

"I cannot."

"You can and you must."

"I know not how, for I would not do one act to bring suspicion upon myself."

"There are a dozen officers here desperately in love with you, and willing to do your bidding."

"That may be."

"You must tell one of them that you wish to send a letter to Pocket City for me, to one there whom I am interested in, and he is to get a courier, one of the cowboys about the post to take it."

"I cannot."

"You must, I say."

"I will not compromise myself."

"There is nothing to compromise you; but it might, did you ask Colonel Dunwoody to send the courier for you."

"No."

"I say yes, and if you refuse, I shall simply ask to see Colonel Dunwoody and tell him that you are my wife."

"Not not not!"

"Then do as I say."

The woman was silent a moment and then said:

"Yes, I will do so."

"Where is the letter?"

"Here, already written and addressed."

Nina De Sutro looked at the address and read aloud:

"TO BONNIE BELLE,

"The Flying Pan Hotel,

"POCKET CITY,

"Yellow Dust Valley."

"Another victim, I suppose, of your treachery?" she said with a sneer.

"She is one I love."

"Ah! so you once told me."

"Are you jealous?"

"Thank God, no!" was the emphatic rejoinder.

"You will prove that by sending the letter?"

"I will," she replied and she placed the letter in her bosom.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### CONQUERED.

"Is this all?" asked Nina De Sutro, as she turned toward the door as though to end the interview.

"No."

"What else have you to say?"

"I am under sentence of death."

"I am well aware of that."

"I am to die upon the gallows."

"So I know."

"That will disgrace you."

"In what way, pray, will it affect me?"

"I am your husband."



"Alas! yes."  
 "And you will then feel the dishonor."  
 "I?"  
 "Yes."  
 "It will not be known."  
 "It might leak out."  
 "I shall take good care that it shall not."  
 "Well, that is all the sympathy you show."  
 "For you, yes."  
 "I who saved your life."  
 "Yes, and then wrecked it."  
 "You are a very beautiful wreck."  
 "Thank you."  
 "You have grown more beautiful since I saw you last."  
 "My heart is not seen."  
 "Then it is hurt, is it?"  
 "It was cruelly hurt, yes, and by you, as well you are aware, Silk Lasso Sam the outlaw."  
 "But I got over the wound, the sting of dishonor of becoming your wife, and I shall bury the past in the grave with you."  
 "If I am bitter, seemingly heartless now, your cruelty made me so; but you did not destroy my whole trust in manhood, thank Heaven, and yet I may find new happiness in life."  
 "In wedding Colonel Dunwoody?" sneered the man.  
 He expected to see her start at his words.  
 But she did not even change color, and answered most serenely:  
 "Yes, if I can win him, when, by your death upon the gallows, I become a widow."  
 "Why observe such formalities as my being alive?"  
 "Because you have not made me so vile as you are, imbibed though my life has been," was the stern response.  
 "Well, I am sorry to block your game, but I must."  
 "What do you mean?"  
 "I mean simply that I cannot find it in my heart to die just to make you a widow."  
 "I do not yet understand."  
 "I must be more explicit."  
 "I wish that you would."  
 "Well, I do not intend to die."  
 "You mean that you will not die on the gallows?"  
 "Yes, about that."  
 "But you are sentenced."  
 "Yes, and have stood under the shadow of death a hundred times yet live."  
 "This time there will be no escape for you."  
 "Oh, yes there will."  
 "Do you intend to commit suicide?"  
 "Oh no, I do not intend to hand in my checks yet, but to live."  
 "There is no pleading for pardon that will save you."  
 "I do not intend to plead."  
 "And nothing that I could say would be of avail."  
 "I do not ask you to say anything."  
 "What then?"  
 "To act."  
 "What can I do?"  
 "Much."  
 "No."  
 "Oh, yes you can."  
 "I can do nothing for you, nothing whatever."  
 "Let me tell you that, unaided, from this place I could not escape."  
 "I am sorry, very sorry not to make a widow of you in a few weeks, so that you could wed the colonel, but I cannot die just to oblige you, and so I call upon you to save me."  
 "I could no more save your life than I could get the commander of this fort to-day."  
 "So you may think, without considering the matter, but a moment's thought will prove to you that you are to-day in command of about half the officers in the fort, married and single, while Miss Clarice Carr divides the honors with you, and I will admit, for candor urges me to do so, that she holds perhaps a trifle more power."  
 "Then get her to aid you."  
 "I would gladly do so were it possible, which it is not, as I am not bound to her as I am to you, so cannot force obedience from her."  
 "You were a fool to come here as you did, and kidnap her."  
 "I would have been considered deuced clever had I gotten a big ransom for her return and escaped from harm's way."  
 "But you did not?"  
 "That is owing to Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell hanging so persistently upon my trail, and having me under suspicion, aided by that miner, Deadshot Dean, running me to earth as he did."  
 "Luck was against me in spite of my holding trumps."  
 "Well, as you have put your head in the noose you must abide the consequences."  
 The man laughed, and then replied:  
 "I am one never to yield to odds, and they are heavy against me now."  
 "Feeling as I do, I have sent for you that I might ask you to aid me to escape."  
 "I cannot."  
 "I say that you shall."  
 "I could not do so."

"You must find a way, for you are as ingenious as you are beautiful, and you have money, and that is half the victory won."  
 "If you refuse, then I shall, at the last moment, before ascending the steps of the gallows, ask for a word to speak and denounce you as my wife."  
 "You know me, so do you abide the consequences, Nina, my wife."  
 The woman's face became pallid, and she gasped for breath; but quickly recovering herself she said:  
 "I will do all in my power to save you, for I know that you will carry out your threat."

## CHAPTER XV.

## NINA'S APPEAL.

THE man gazed at the woman with a malicious smile as she turned upon her heel and walked toward the door.  
 "I have triumphed," he said.  
 "Over a weak woman," was her fierce reply as she turned upon him, her face now glowing with anger and hatred.  
 "A woman, but never a weak one are you."  
 "Are you going?"  
 "Yes."  
 "Good-by."  
 "We shall not meet again."  
 "I do not mind that, only if I go to the gallows do you remember to be there to hear my last words, for I shall do as I have said."  
 "They will never be uttered."  
 "That means that I will be aided to escape?"  
 "Yes."  
 "I thank you for your unintentional kindness, and I regret that my love of life will not permit me to prove my appreciation by making you a widow, yet it is so."  
 "Good-by, Nina."  
 "Good-by, Silk Lasso Sam, the outlaw," and with a little laugh she glided out of the door, not hearing his muttered words:  
 "Now with my sister to aid me, as she surely will, and Nina De Sutro, the gallows will never see me its victim."  
 "You can return to your post, sentinel, close to the cabin," said Nina as she passed the soldier, who gave her an officer's salute and obeyed.  
 Straight to headquarters went Nina De Sutro and sent her name in to Colonel Dunwoody, asking an interview.  
 The colonel came out himself to receive her, and walking with her to the end of the piazza, apart from the sentinel on duty, placed a chair for her.  
 "This is an unexpected honor," he said, pleasantly.  
 "I have come on business, Colonel Dunwoody."  
 "I am at your service, be the motive of your visit what it may, Miss Nina."  
 "Thank you, sir."  
 "You knew that I went with your permission to visit the prisoner this afternoon?"  
 "I gave orders that you should be allowed to do so, Nina."  
 "Of course, Colonel Dunwoody, I feel for that unfortunate man, in spite of his having been proven what he was, a most kindly feeling."  
 "I can understand that thoroughly, Miss Nina, in that you owe to him your life, not to speak of having seen him afterward in Mexico win honors that only a hero could."  
 "It is a terrible misfortune that such a man as he was capable of becoming should allow his moral character to be broken utterly and sink to the level of a common criminal."  
 "Brave, I admit him to be, a genius in his way, one whose deeds would make him a splendid commander, and with his good looks, accomplishments and courtly manners, the wonder in my mind was that you did not fall desperately in love with him, for few girls, circumstanced as you have been, Miss Nina, could have held their hearts in their keeping."  
 "You are made of very stern and sterling material, my dear Miss De Sutro."  
 "I thank you for saying so, Colonel Dunwoody, for it shows that you kindly appreciate my character."  
 "But, to this unfortunate man."  
 "Yes."  
 "You said that he had asked to see me that I might serve him in some way, as he wished to trust me with certain deeds to transact for him?"  
 "Such was the communication that Captain Caruth brought me from him."  
 "Well, sir, I went to see him, and I was there fully an hour."  
 "Though he did not say as much, he is most deeply interested in a young woman in Pocket City, and he has written her a letter which he wished me to send to her by courier."  
 "Indeed?"  
 "I, of course, would do nothing without consulting you, and so said to him that I would take the letter and send it through if possible."  
 "You have the letter, Miss Nina?"  
 "Here it is, sir."  
 The colonel glanced at the address and said:

"It is to Bonnie Belle, one of the most remarkable characters in this land of strange people."  
 "She is a young and very beautiful girl, I have heard, for I have never seen her; but, I have heard much of her through Surgeon Frank Powell, Captain Caruth and Buffalo Bill who know her well."  
 "What do they say of her, sir?"  
 "That she is a young lady scarcely twenty, of great loveliness of form and face, accomplished and refined, yet one who has killed her man, as they have it out here, runs a hotel and gambling den and is beloved by every man in the mines."  
 "Can she be this man's wife?" asked Nina in a low tone, and she would not look the colonel in the face as she asked the question.  
 "It may be so, though I cannot believe that she knows him as he really is, for she is not one, from all I have heard, to be the ally of such a man, his confederate in crime."  
 "Well, colonel, he wishes this letter sent through to her, and I promised to do so for him, so I appeal to you for your consent."  
 "I cannot refuse the appeal, Miss Nina, for I can really see no harm in the letter, and it would be hard to decline a favor asked by a man in his position, wicked as he is."  
 "Oh, I thank you, Colonel Dunwoody, for you are always kind and just."  
 "You are good to say so."  
 "I will send my aide with the letter to a courier to take it at once to this strange woman."  
 And so it was that the letter that overtook Bonnie Belle on the eastward trail was sent.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## A FAIR PLOTTER.

NINA DE SUTRO went from the quarters of Colonel Dunwoody to her own pleasant rooms in the house of Lieutenant-Colonel Ravel De Sutro.  
 She had an extended view of miles and miles of the superb scenery visible from the fort.  
 There was a large herd of cattle, guarded by picturesque-looking cowboys in the distance.  
 A drove of horses were feeding a few miles away, and a couple of troops were drilling down in the valley, and all preparing to cease work as the day was closing.  
 In the Plaza of the fort the band was playing sweet music, and upon the bluff overhanging the river, officers, ladies and children were gathered awaiting the time for parade, a spectacle which no one at the fort ever cared to miss.  
 But upon this evening all these scenes and actions held no charm for Nina De Sutro.  
 She threw herself into a chair in front of the open window in her sitting-room, and with her hand clasped over one knee, a favorite attitude of hers in reverie, began to think.  
 "How can I save that man from the gallows?" at last burst from her lips, and revealed what her thoughts were.  
 "He must be saved," she went on musing:  
 "Or he will ruin me, for he will carry out his threat."  
 "I know that he will show me no mercy, that he will not soften in his last moments, but grow more revengeful, so he must never go to the gallows."  
 "Great God!"  
 "What thoughts are those crowding upon me now?"  
 "Surely the devil is tempting me when I feel stealing into my brain and heart the thought that if he were *poisoned* it would be believed that he committed suicide and the act would silence him forever, thus keeping my secret and making me a widow by the same murderous deed."  
 "No! no! get thee hence, Satan, for I am not wicked, and what I did do wrong was not so intended, for I became his wife, believing that he loved me."  
 "If I hate him now, and God knows that I have had cause, and love another, has he not given me cause, and has not that other won me by contrast in being so noble a specimen of true manhood?"  
 "No, I will do no wrong, for I am not wicked, and what I am he made me."  
 "But dare I lose the man I now love with all my heart and soul by letting him know my secret?"  
 "Dare I let that man come out upon the gallows and brand me with dishonor as his wife?"  
 "No, that cannot, must not be, and it shall not be, for I will save him, though, until I know that he is dead I can never wed the one I love."  
 "Yes, I must save him from the gallows, for then I save myself."  
 "Yet how am I to do it?"  
 This question she could not answer.  
 In thinking it all over her brow grew clouded, her lips set sternly and she seemed as though plotting some daring, desperate deed.  
 "I have no sympathy for him, so can only act from my own selfish motives," she said after awhile.  
 "I feel for him, yes, and as he saved my life should now save his."  
 "This should prompt me too; but self will



assert it sright, and can I save him and not compromise myself?

"I will think over how it can be done."

Again she was lost in silent reverie for a long while, to at last have her face light up as she sprung to her feet with the determinedly uttered words:

"Yes, I can do it, and I will."

She paced up and down the room now in an excited manner, and then said:

"Yes, at the masquerade, when I put on top boots, a military cloak and hat, and the false mustache and imperial every one took me for Lieutenant Dade, who is just my size, and my chance to aid his escape is to wait until the time when the lieutenant is to be officer of the day."

"He can prove an *alibi*, and I will see to it that I do also, for it can be done."

"I shall pray for rain on that night, and I can slip out and search the cabin, pass the sentinel, call him into the cabin, and cover him while the prisoner binds and gags him."

"Then, in a cowboy suit I take him, he can leave the fort for the scout's quarters and thus secure a horse and make his escape, for he will have a night's start."

"If he is captured then I cannot help it, and I can do no more."

"Of course it will be thought that some one of the cowboys was the ally of the outlaw, for he is said to have had spies at the post, and no one will ever suspect me, for I shall so plan it that no suspicion shall fall upon me in spite of my disguise."

"I can have the prisoner speak of me before the soldier, as an ally and one who has played the part of Lieutenant Dade to aid his escape, and this will free the officer from all trouble."

"Yes, this must be my plan, unless some better plot should come to me between now and that awful day of execution."

"I will ask the general, when the courier comes back, to allow me to see the prisoner and report that his letter was delivered, and then I can tell him of my plot, and may the saints aid me in carrying it out."

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE COURIER'S RETURN.

THE courier sent to Pocket City, with a letter from the condemned prisoner to Bonnie Belle, returned in good time to the fort and reported to the officer who had sent him there.

"I went to Pocket City, sir, and found that the lady had just started East that morning on the coach."

"Then you did not see her?" asked Lieutenant Turpin the colonel's aide.

"Oh yes, sir, for I followed and overtook the coach, and gave her the letter."

"And was an answer given you, Jack?"

"No letter, sir, only the lady told me to say that her answer was simply:

"I will."

"Well, I'll so report to the colonel."

This the young officer did and Colonel Dunwoody at once sent for Nina De Sutro.

She came to the headquarters and was told the report of the courier, after which the colonel said, without her having to make the request to see the outlaw again:

"Now, Miss Nina, will you be good enough to deliver this answer to the prisoner, who I suppose will understand it, or shall I send word by Lieutenant Turpin?"

"I will go, sir, but may I see the courier, so that I can fully understand the report?"

"Certainly, I will have him sent to your quarters, so that you can question him, and at your own pleasure you can send for the officer of the day to escort you to the outlaw's cabin."

"I will see the courier upon my return home, sir," was the answer, and Nina De Sutro half an hour after saw Texas Jack enter the gate and walk rapidly toward the quarters of Lieutenant Colonel De Sutro.

She met the scout at the door, for she knew him well, and he bowed courteously and said:

"I have orders to report to you here, Miss De Sutro."

"Ah! it was you then, Texas Jack, who took the letter to Pocket City?"

"Yes, miss, I was the courier, for although it was to have been sent by a cowboy it was decided that it would be best to have me go."

"And you found the one to whom it was addressed at Pocket City?"

"No, miss, she had started East in the coach that morning, and so I rode on and overtook her."

"And her answer?"

"Was:

"Simply say that I will."

"What else?"

"Not a word, miss."

"Who is she?"

"One of the handsomest ladies I ever saw?"

"A lady?" said Nina with a sneer.

"Yes, indeed, Miss De Sutro, one of the noblest of her sex if only half that is said of her goodness is true."

"Yet she is the keeper of a border hotel and gambling den?"

"True, miss, yet she's a lady for all that."

"Where was she going?"

"East, the driver told me, on a visit."

"She did not turn back?"

"Oh, no, miss, she kept on in the coach."

"And then?"

"She paid me most liberally, giving me fifty dollars, which I have already handed in to the treasurer of the Scouts' League, for aid to our men when they are in distress and ill."

"Just what I would expect of you, Texas Jack; but the prisoner asked me to pay for the services of the courier."

"Thank you, Miss De Sutro, but I made no charge for my services in this matter, and I certainly would not take money from a man under sentence of death, no matter what his crimes may have been," responded the scout.

"Well, Texas Jack, I can only thank you most kindly for the outlaw prisoner, who asked me to do him a service, and which I hope to be able to do for him."

The scout now departed, and soon after Nina De Sutro sought the officer of the day, and found that he had already received orders to conduct her to the cabin of the prisoner.

As before, the sentinel was withdrawn out of hearing, and when the visitor entered, Silk Lasso Sam arose to receive her.

"I have news for you," she said, coldly.

"Well?"

"The courier to Pocket City has returned."

"Ah! and he found the one to whom I sent that letter?"

"Yes, he overtook her on her way East."

"On her way East?" and the man spoke with an anxiety of look and tone which Nina De Sutro could not but observe.

"Yes."

"Then she sent no answer to my letter?"

"She did."

"Hal and that answer was—"

"I will."

"That answer was sufficient," he said, in a voice full of relief.

"You are satisfied with it, then?"

"I am."

"I do not understand it."

"Nor is there need that you should do so."

"Well, it is a matter of most perfect indifference to me; but I asked to see you to-day, to deliver the message."

"You are very kind."

"That I might tell you of the plot I had formed to save you."

"Say rather to prevent the exposure of the fact that you are my wife."

"Well, have it any way you please; but, I have hit upon a plan which I hope will be successful, and I desire to make it known to you."

"If anything better presents itself I will find a way to acquaint you with the fact."

"Now hear my plan," and she told just what she had decided upon.

"It will do, I think; but, if you decide upon another let me know in time."

"I shall need some money when I go, so do not forget to bring it the night of my escape."

And thus these two parted again

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### A VISITOR AT PIONEER POST.

HORSESHOE NED, the driver of the Overland coach running to and from Pioneer Post, drove into the fort with an all-important air toward sunset one evening, caused by having a lady seated upon the box with him.

She was attired in mourning, wearing a heavy crepe veil which she drew over her face as she approached the gate in the stockade wall.

But Horseshoe Ned knew that it was a very beautiful face, with large eyes that were simply magnificent, though she hid them under a pair of eyeglasses when she drew her veil about her.

Who she was Horseshoe Ned did not know, more than that she had been transferred to his tender care by the driver who had had her in charge up to the station where his run ended.

"I say, Pard Ned, jist let yerself out in entertainin' thet leddy, fer she are a sweet one and jist as perlike as kin be."

"She rides on the box right through, and wants ter know ther whole history o' ther trail as we goes along."

"She are mournin' fer somebody as is dead and gone, I gusses, from her dressin' in black, and I feel sorry for her, for I sees away back in her eyes that she hain't jist happy, notwithstanding her pretty smile."

So had said the driver who had given her into the charge of Horseshoe Ned, who replied:

"I'll treat her same as a princess, pard; but what is her name?"

"I hain't heard it, pard."

"Waal, she's a beauty, so interdooce me."

The past guardian on the trail of the fair stranger led Horseshoe Ned up to the lady, as she came out from breakfast at the station, and said:

"Here's whar I leaves yer, miss, but I gives yer inter charge o' ther best driver on ther Overland, and one who has got a name as a dandy all round, take him at what yer please."

"He are Horseshoe Ned, miss, and he takes

ther old hearse through ter ther fort, and yer see he's got ther best coach and team on ther entire outfit."

"Don't be skeered, though his run has been known as the Death Trail, fer on it Silk Lasso Sam and his men have been hanging out for deviltry, though that game won't be played no more."

"Not knowin' your name, miss, I can't interdooc you ter Horseshoe Ned, only him ter you."

"My name is—" and after a short hesitation she added the name:

"Ruth Arden, Mr. Baldy."

Having learned the name, Baldy was not going to leave the introduction half done, so said quickly:

"Miss Ruth Arden, Horseshoe Ned, and if you don't treat her first class yer quarrels with me."

"I am sure that he will do all in his power, Mr. Baldy, to make my ride as pleasant a one as it has been with you."

And Horseshoe Ned did, for he showed how he could drive, gathered wild flowers here and there for his fair passenger, told her the legends of the trails, and showed her the scenes of Silk Lasso Sam's red exploits, and graves which he had been the one to dot the roadside with.

"I tell yer, miss, thet Silk Lasso Sam is a terror, and I has seen him do killin' more times than I cares to remember."

"It hain't been so very long since since he kilt my Pard Ribbons, and he has nipped me slight several times; but that is his business and drivin' is mine and it's every man to his occupation, and I must say Silk Lasso Sam stood above 'em all in what he understood."

"And he is now a prisoner at the fort, sir?"

"Yes, miss."

"He's soon ter be hanged, they says, though I won't believe it until I sees it."

"Why, do you think he'll receive a pardon?"

"A pardon, miss? Silk Lasso Sam receive a pardon?"

"No, indeed, miss, never from God or man!" was the vehement response.

"He has been so very wicked then?"

"He has had nothing but wickedness in his heart, miss."

"Nobody has been able to escape him, men, women or children, for he is merciless to all, and but for Buffalo Bill, Surgeon Powell and a miner named Deadshot Dean, he'd hev gone on his wicked ways and done no end of harm."

"I am sorry to hear that he was a man of whom nothing good could be said, for it is seldom you find a man who has fallen so low as that," sadly said the passenger.

"He brought it on himself, miss."

"Yes, I can believe that; but why is it that you do not believe that he will be hanged?"

"Well, miss, he has been in so many tight places and always gives his foes the slip in some way, that I has begun to think he hain't born ter be hanged."

"One cannot live an evil life and never expect just punishment in the end, sir."

"Just punishment for him, miss, would be to my thinking, solitary confinement in a cell where he'd hev ther chance ter be alone with his conscience and feel all ther deeds he has been guilty of, for shootin' would be too good fer him and hangin' would soon be over with."

"But there's the fort, miss, and we'll soon be there."

"Has you friends there, miss?"

"I have a letter to Colonel Dunwoody," was the reply, and after a couple of hours' rest the visitor to Pioneer Post presented herself at headquarters and asked to see Colonel Dunwoody.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### ARMY HOSPITALITY.

COLONEL DUNWOODY received his fair visitor without any ceremony, wondering what had brought a lady by coach so far to see him.

He saw a form of exquisite grace, clad in black, and when she threw back her veil and her face was revealed in all its beauty he was fairly startled, for it brought to him at once the memory of an ideal portrait which he had seen in the long ago, and which he had in vain sought to find the counterpart of in the real, through life.

He bowed and led her to a seat, while he said in the courteous manner natural to him:

"Pray tell me how I can serve you—miss."

He added the *miss* after a slight hesitation, for it did not appear to him that he stood in the presence of a married lady.

"Permit me to introduce myself, Colonel Dunwoody, as Miss Ruth Arden, and to say that I am here to present a letter to you from General S—to insure the fulfillment of the request I shall have to make you."

She gazed into the handsome face of the man before her with a look in which there was both confidence and admiration commingled.

She had heard of the daring, dashing Indian-fighter, the youngest officer of his high rank in the army, and one whom report said was as noble in nature as he was brave.

"I assure you, Miss Arden, I should be most



happy to do all in my power for you, even did you not bear this letter from General S—," and the colonel broke the letter open with a polite:

"Pardon me while I read it, please."

A cloud crossed his brow as he read the purport of the communication, an official permission for Miss Arden to visit her brother, the outlaw chief known as Silk Lasso Sam.

"Your brother, Miss Arden?" asked the colonel and there was almost reproach in the tone.

"Yes, sir, your prisoner is my brother, for I will not disown him, even though I must deeply regret that he is so unfortunate as to be under sentence of death for his many heinous crimes."

"Miss Arden, I deeply deplore his fate, especially the more since now I have met you."

"I felt in my conversation with him, that he had been well born and reared a gentleman, whatever the sad circumstances which had made him a criminal and fugitive from justice."

"I extend to you my deepest sympathy, Miss Arden, and I will at once escort you to the place where your brother is held a prisoner and arrange that you see him alone."

"You are indeed most kind to me, Colonel Dunwoody, and you have my deepest gratitude."

"May I ask where you have obtained quarters while here, Miss Arden, and how long your stay will be?"

"I have secured a room in the sutler's home, sir, and his wife is most kind to me."

"I shall remain only until the next stage departs for the East."

"Permit me to say that my friends, Major and Mrs. Lester, will be, I know, most happy to entertain you while here, and you will find at their house a relative, Miss Clarice Carr, who I know will extend you the warmest of welcomes also, for she is a true woman."

"Perhaps, sir, it would be best for me to remain at the sutler's, for you know that, no matter what I may myself be, I am the sister of the condemned outlaw."

"Through no act of your own; your misfortune, not your fault, Miss Arden, and my friends will regard you and your position as I do."

"You are most kind, sir."

"Then shall we go first to Major Lester's quarters?"

"You know best, Colonel Dunwoody, only I do not wish to be an intruder and—"

"Come, Miss Arden, for such a thing as your intruding is not to be thought of."

"Though our trade is war, we soldiers are yet not wholly heartless," and the colonel led the way from his quarters.

The home of Major Lester was one of the best in the fort, and situated slightly apart from the others.

Clarice Carr was seated upon the piazza as they approached, a book in hand, but she arose and met the colonel cordially, and cast a quick glance at the beautiful girl accompanying him.

There was something in the face of Ruth Arden which seemed to win her at once.

"Miss Carr, let me present to you Miss Ruth Arden, a young lady who brings me a letter from General S—, and who is here on the sad mission of visiting her unfortunate brother and bidding him farewell, for I refer to the outlaw chief, now under sentence of death."

Instantly Clarice Carr stepped up to Ruth and kissed her, while she said quickly, with an intuitive knowledge of why the colonel had brought her there:

"And you will be my guest, will you not, while you are here, for you will need me to cheer you up, I know?"

The tears came into the beautiful eyes of Ruth, and she said in a voice that quivered:

"Yes, for your sympathy and friendship will be so dear to me."

"You did just what I was going to request of you, Miss Clarice, for Miss Arden is at the sutler's, but I will have her things sent here, as I know that Lester and that sweet wife of his will do as you have, ask Miss Arden to be your guest."

"They will indeed, Colonel Dunwoody, but they are not at home just now."

"Well, Miss Arden will return here when she has seen her brother."

"I will come within an hour, Miss Arden, to fetch you back with me," was the prompt reply of Clarice, and both Ruth and the colonel gave her a look of gratitude for her thoughtfulness.

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE MUTINY.

ALL wondered as they saw Colonel Dunwoody escorting a veiled lady in the direction of the cabin where Silk Lasso Sam was held a prisoner.

Who was she?

These and other questions were asked, yet remained unanswered.

Captain Dick Caruth was officer of the day, and Colonel Dunwoody sent a soldier in search of him.

He joined them at the barrier which shut off the prisoner's cabin, and was introduced to Ruth, who still kept her veil concealing her face

completely, for in spite of her being dressed differently, and with her hair arranged in a different style from what she had worn it as Bonnie Belle, and having her name changed, he had seen her at Pocket City and she did not wish to be recognized.

Then too she desired to also avoid Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Frank Powell, who also knew her well, and might recognize her as Bonnie Belle, and if not, must certainly be struck with her resemblance to that young lady.

Captain Caruth bowed low, heard what the colonel had to say and at once said:

"I will report to the prisoner his sister's coming, Colonel Dunwoody, and—" turning to Ruth:

"If I can serve you in any way command me during your stay here, Miss Arden."

"You are all so good to me," was the low reply.

Captain Caruth at once hastened on ahead and coming to the sentinel he said:

"Sentinel, march forty paces from the cabin and take up your beat there, for there is a lady to see the prisoner alone."

The sentinel saluted and obeyed, and opening the cabin door Captain Caruth entered.

Silk Ribbon Sam greeted him politely, while he said in a tone in which there was some sarcasm:

"This is an honor, Captain Caruth, I appreciate."

"The honor, sir, is to come in the visit of one whom you should have thought of ere you allowed yourself to become what you now are," was the stern reply.

The prisoner started and his face changed color.

"I do not comprehend, sir," he faltered.

"You have a sister, sir?"

"Yes, my sister Ruth."

"Miss Arden, your sister, is now here to visit you, for she is coming with the colonel to whom she brought a letter from Colonel S—."

A glad flash swept over the face of the outlaw while he said in a tone that seemed sincere:

"God bless her for coming here to see me."

"She is a brave, noble girl, true as steel."

"It is to be regretted that you did not think of her in the past."

"I did, and of my mother too; but I was born bad, my heart was wicked from boyhood and it was destined for me to be the devil I am," and the prisoner spoke bitterly, and Captain Caruth said in a kindly tone:

"Well, Arden, your sister is here, and so take what comfort you can from her visit."

"She can remain an hour, and see you wholly alone."

"I thank you, sir," and the outlaw bowed his head as the captain turned and left the cabin.

"I have told your brother of your coming, Miss Arden, and he is ready to receive you."

"I regret that I cannot free him of his irons while you are with him, but it cannot be."

"I do not ask it, sir."

"He must not expect favors where he has shown none, and led the life he has," was the reply.

The colonel then escorted Ruth to the door, and bowing, said:

"The sentinel will inform you, Miss Arden, when Miss Carr comes for you."

Ruth bowed in silence, and entered the cabin.

Her brother sat there, in irons, his head bowed upon his hands.

She turned pale at the sight, brave as she was, and stood for an instant regarding him.

Then she said, softly:

"Arden, my brother."

He arose slowly, his face pallid, and in silence extended his manacled hands.

Either he was playing a part with perfect acting, or he felt deeply and despairingly his situation, and that she should see him thus.

"My poor brother," she said, laying her hand lightly upon his shoulder.

"You pity me, then, Ruth?" he asked, in a quivering voice.

"From the very depths of my heart and soul I pity you, brother."

"That is why I came at your call, came when I received your letter, to say what words of cheer I could to you."

"You came to do more, Ruth?"

"You mean to save you?"

"Yes," he said, eagerly.

"I have come to save you, brother, for with you I feel that you are not fit to die, that you should have time for repentance, should do all in your power to atone for the past."

"God bless you, Ruth, and I know that he will."

"I felt that you would not desert me in my last hour."

"No, I have long tried to save you, have worked so hard to help you, to take you from your evil life, and it seemed all in vain, for you seemed wedded irrevocably to sin and every pledge you made me was broken."

"But I am not here to upbraid you, but to have a long talk with you."

"Sit down and let me tell you just what I have done and why I am here," and she gently forced the prisoner into his chair while she began to pace slowly up and down the cabin.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE REALITY OF AN IDEAL.

THE interview between the brother and sister was brought to an end by the coming of the sentinel who reported that Miss Carr awaited Miss Arden.

"I will join her immediately, please say," was Ruth's response, and then she turned again to her brother.

"You will see me again before you go, Ruth?"

"Yes, for I will be here four days and shall ask the colonel for leave to spend an hour with you each morning and afternoon."

"You have made me very happy, Arden, in the promises you have made me, and I feel that you will keep them."

A moment more and she was gone.

The sentinel took his post again without the door, and just beyond, Clarice Carr awaited with Major Lester and his wife.

They greeted her most cordially, the major saying:

"We decided to come after you also, Miss Arden, and you must feel perfectly at home with us."

"Yes, my dear Miss Arden, the colonel has done us a favor in allowing us to claim you while here," Mrs. Lester remarked.

Thus greeted, Ruth felt that she was among friends, and she went to the major's quarters as to her own home, so hospitable was their treatment of her.

Not a word was said about the prisoner, her brother, to render her unhappy, and refusing themselves to company that night, except the colonel, who called, they devoted the evening to their fair guest.

At the request of the colonel Clarice sang for them, and when she had done so she turned and asked:

"Do you not sing, Miss Arden?"

"Yes, for I am devoted to music," was the simple reply.

Urged to sing she sat down to Clarice Carr's harp which stood nearest to her side, and she had only to run her fingers over the strings to show that it was an artist's hands that touched them.

Then in a rich, melodious contralto she sung that old but charming ballad:

"I cannot sing those old songs,  
We've sung so oft together."

Her hearers listened breathlessly for her voice stirred their inmost hearts, and when she had ceased, she said softly:

"I do not know why I sung that song, for it was my brother's favorite and we often have sung together, for he has a superb voice, or rather had when I knew him in the long ago."

It was her first reference to her outlaw brother since entering the house and brave men that they were Colonel Dunwoody and Major Lester felt the tears dimming their eyes in sympathy for the beautiful girl.

But she quickly said, as though to destroy the effect she had caused by her song:

"You have an exquisite soprano, Miss Carr, and I sing alto, so suppose we have a duet."

"Willingly," and several duets were sung until Miss Lester said:

"Now I am not half satisfied yet, and as the colonel has a lovely tenor and my husband sings base, I insist upon a quartette."

All readily agreed, and the four fine voices accorded wonderfully well together and until a late hour the musical treat was kept up.

At last the colonel left, after a pleasant little supper, and as he walked back to his quarters he was in a contemplative mood, for he mused aloud:

"At last I have met my ideal."

"I did begin to feel that in that brilliant woman Nina De Suro I had found her, and that Clarice Carr was one to make me a happy man; but no, she of the dreamy eyes is my ideal, the reality of the portrait I saw years ago, and often wondered if I would ever meet a woman with just such a face."

"And now the one who has that face is the sister of the vilest man who ever crossed my path."

"Still an angel and a devil may be akin, and so it is with that man and this beautiful girl."

"Ah me! I wish I could look back into the life of Ruth Arden and read it as an open book, for she interests me more than I would admit even to myself; yes, fascinates me, for that is the word to use where her influence is concerned."

And thus musing Colonel Dunwoody reached his quarters.

In the mean while those at the major's had gone to their rooms for the night.

Both Major Lester and his wife had spoken most kindly to Ruth and said that they were sorry she was not to remain at the fort, and Clarice had escorted the guest to her room.

A sitting-room divided the chamber of Clarice from the one occupied by Ruth, and the two had talked together before saying good-night.

"You are tired I know, so I must not keep you up any later, for it is midnight."



"We breakfast at nine you know," said Clarice, and she kissed Ruth, who, hesitating an instant, replied:

"Miss Carr, you have been so sweet to me, so sisterly, that I wish to make a confession to you, but in confidence."

"I do not wish to deceive you, and therefore I will tell you that Arden is not my name."

"True, it was my mother's maiden name, but I assumed it, for the one I bear has been dishonored by my brother, and I did not wish to bring shame upon an honored name by letting it be known who the man you know as Silk Lasso Sam, really is."

"To others I am Ruth Arden, to you, in confidence, I will say that I am Ruth Leigh, and my poor brother's real name is Arden Leigh."

"Good-night," and Ruth glided quickly away to her room, while Clarice murmured gently:

"Poor girl, yours is a noble nature."

## CHAPTER XXII.

### NINA'S RESOLVE.

RUTH did not ask the favor of Colonel Dunwoody, to be allowed to see her brother daily, for it was not necessary.

He anticipated her by calling the next morning and asking for her.

"I have given orders, Miss Arden, that you shall be allowed to go to and from the prison where your brother is confined at your will."

"You are most kind, Colonel Dunwoody."

"No, I am only just, for you have come a long way, have you not, to see one whom your woman's heart clings to in spite of what he may be."

"A mother's love and a sister's are to me the purest of all affections, and I can understand just how you feel toward the one who has gone to the bad as your unfortunate brother has."

"I appreciate all that you say and do for me, Colonel Dunwoody, and I make no effort to disguise my deep love for my brother, for I remember him only as he ever was toward me in the past."

"His nature was warped and he went wrong when quite a young man, and just when we began to feel that he was saved, that he had seen the evil of his ways and was coming back to a life of honor, one whom he loved, whom he idolized in truth, told him that she could never be his wife, that she loved another."

"That blow made a madman of him and he sought to take the life of his rival, and from that day became a fugitive and a wanderer, a hunted man, feeling that the hand of every one was against him."

"I do not defend him, and I ask no mercy for him; but I thank you for your goodness in allowing me to see him often the few days that I will be here."

"It would be cruel to ask you to remain longer," said the colonel.

"No, I must go my way, Colonel Dunwoody."

"And do you wish me to send any communication to you when—when—all is over?"

"Nothing, thank you, sir."

"I wish no tidings of what occurs after I leave the fort."

"But surely we will see you again?"

"Where and when?"

She asked the question quickly, almost excitedly.

"That remains alone for you to say, Miss Arden, for I do not wish you to drift out of our memories and our lives, after having crossed our paths as you have."

"I am but the sister of the outlaw Silk Lasso Sam, remember."

"Granted."

"This does not deter you from wishing to keep up a friendship with me?"

"Not in the slightest, for I abhor the old Biblical law of visiting upon the children the sins of the fathers, only applying it in your case to a sister's suffering for a brother's crimes."

"You are generous, you are just," and Ruth held out her hand, which the colonel held while she continued:

"See if you wish my friendship when you hear of me again."

"If you do, then Miss Carr can tell you of me, for she has promised to be my friend and correspond with me."

"Now can I go and spend an hour with that unfortunate brother of mine, over whom the shadow of the gallows hangs like a nightmare?"

"Yes, I will escort you to the cabin."

When the day came around for the departure of the coach, Major Lester and his wife felt the deepest regret at having to give up their lovely guest.

They had become deeply attached to her, and yet they could not urge her to remain longer, for they wished her to be far away when the day of execution came, which would end the guilty career of Silk Lasso Sam and the lives of his men, sentenced to die at the same time.

Both the major and his wife had observed the deep interest felt by the colonel in their guest, and had spoken of it to each other.

"The colonel's heart has been touched by the sorrow of that beautiful girl," said Mrs. Lester, and her husband replied:

"Pity begets love, it is said, and I really wish the colonel would care for her, as she is a very superior girl, and whatever the faults of the brother she is as pure as snow."

Of course all in the fort had come to understand just why Ruth had come, and those who saw her had felt deepest compassion for her.

That she was a lady all acknowledged, whatever Silk Lasso Sam might be.

During her stay at Major Lester's all had discreetly kept away from that officer's home, well understanding that Miss Arden cared for no visitors, and that Mrs. Lester preferred that she would not be called upon, though nearly every lady in the fort left their cards "for Miss Arden," as an appreciation of her misfortunes, and sympathy in her sorrows.

Nina De Sutro had heard of the coming of this visitor to the doomed man.

He had not spoken to her, during their short married life, of having a sister; in fact he had said nothing to her of his past.

Who then, she wondered, was this beautiful woman, for she did not regard her as really his sister.

Not connecting her in any way with Bonnie Belle, she looked upon herself, Bonnie Belle and this stranger as three, perhaps, who held a claim upon the outlaw.

She felt no jealousy of her, for she hated the prisoner too sincerely for that emotion to find lodgment in her heart; but she was anxious to know who she was, and all about her.

She had been told that she was very beautiful.

So she would see and know for herself, for she said:

"I must see and talk with that woman."

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### TWO MEETINGS.

WHEN Nina De Sutro set out to do anything, she accomplished it.

She had resolved that she would see Ruth Arden, and have a talk with her.

The interest shown in her by Colonel Dunwoody she could not understand, any more than she could why the Lesters had made her their guest, and Clarice Carr seemed so devoted to her.

She dared not speak to her in public, as it was known that Ruth met no one, nor cared to.

She must see her, then, at the major's.

So she plotted to do so in her own way.

That way was to get Mrs. Lester and Clarice away for some reason, and then go and call, for the major would be either on duty or at the club.

There was to be a gathering of the ladies for their weekly talks over acts of charity, sewing for the soldiers' children, or parties, dinners or excursions to be held, and so Nina planned to have the meeting when the major would be absent and Mrs. Lester and Clarice would have to attend.

She used Mrs. De Sutro her kinswoman as a cat's-paw, telling her that she wished to give a party and that Mrs. Lester and Clarice were to be consulted, while she, Nina, was to be kept in ignorance of the affair.

Then she went to visit an officer's wife living nearest to the Lesters, and when she saw, from her seat in the window, first the major go out, then the two ladies, she waited until they entered her own house and then ended her visit abruptly.

At once she walked by the Lester home and suddenly turned into the gate.

Running up the steps she opened the door and called aloud:

"Clarice! Clarice!"

At the same time she entered the sitting-room.

At her call Ruth Arden, who was there, arose and meeting her said pleasantly:

"Miss Carr and Mrs. Lester have both gone out."

"May I ask who it is that I shall tell them called?"

Nina De Sutro was taken aback, for she beheld before her a woman of a beauty of face and form she had not dreamed she possessed.

"I am Miss De Sutro."

"Are you Miss Ruth Arden?" she asked.

"I am."

"Will you, knowing as I do, your reasons for coming to the fort, let me offer you my sincere sympathy?"

"You are very kind, and I thank you, Miss De Sutro."

"Remember, Miss Arden, it is more than an ordinary interest that I feel in you, as your brother saved my life when I was a school-girl, going to Mexico to attend the convent where I was educated."

"Meeting him here, in the part he was playing with such daring, and believing him to be a man of honor when I met him, I felt more than a passing regard for him, and we were, I may say, the best of friends, yet I never heard him speak of having a sister."

"Yet you see that he has one, and I am sorry he was taken from me, when I was a mere girl, by circumstances which drove him a fugitive from our home."

"I have tried hard to redeem my misguided brother, Miss De Sutro, to bring him back from the path he has chosen, but all in vain, and now he sees an ignominious death staring him in the face, and I thank Heaven that our father and mother are both dead, and that I alone remain to suffer the ignominy and despair of his deeds which bring him in shame to the grave."

Nina De Sutro listened to every word uttered by the maiden, her eyes seeming to pierce to her heart, and she saw only purity, truth and honor upon every feature, and after again expressing her sympathy, turned and left the room, while she said aloud with decided emphasis:

"There is no deception there, for that girl is his sister, and is more unfortunate than even I am, for she loves him."

Hastening home she found that Mrs. De Sutro and her two visitors had gone to join the "Petticoat Convention," as the officers called the gathering of the ladies, and seeking Clarice she said in a whisper:

"I have just seen that beautiful girl."

"Do you mean Miss Arden?"

"Yes, I ran over to see you and calling your name she came out of the sitting-room to say that you and Mrs. Lester had gone out."

"I had a short talk with her, and, Clarice, I pity that poor girl from the bottom of my heart, for she really loves that villainous brother of hers."

"I know that she does," was the quiet reply of Clarice, who did not like it that Ruth, who had sought to avoid every one, had been intruded upon by Nina De Sutro.

When Nina left Ruth the latter gazed after her a moment and then said:

"Miss De Sutro came here on purpose to see me, I feel certain."

"Well, she accomplished her purpose, and what will be the result?"

"I will ask Arden about her, and his saving her life."

As it was time for her to visit her brother she put on her hat and went out.

Just as she reached the end of the parade she came suddenly upon an officer, who started slightly and as he saw her face pale, said quickly:

"Do not be alarmed, Miss Arden, for I could never betray a woman, and your secret is safe with me."

"You recognize me then, Surgeon Powell?"

"Yes, as Bonnie Belle, and Buffalo Bill also recognized you, but to no one else than myself has he made it known."

"We both know, Miss Arden, that you are here to rescue Silk Lasso Sam, and you are playing a bold game daringly; but it is our duty to thwart you if we can."

"Good-morning," and Surgeon Frank Powell raised his hat and went on his way.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE DEPARTURE.

It was with really a sad heart that Clarice Carr felt that she must say farewell to Ruth Arden.

She had become greatly attached to her in the few days while she had been at the fort, and she recognized what a superior woman she was, young in years but old in experience.

The major and his wife also were sorry to see her depart, for they too had been drawn to her most closely.

When the time came for her departure Colonel Dunwoody came over to the major's and for a moment saw Ruth alone.

"Miss Arden, I hope and feel that we will meet again, and I wish to say to you that it is my wish that you will command me in any way in which I can ever be of service to you."

"Will you promise me this, Miss Arden?"

"I will, Colonel Dunwoody, although I am now under the deepest obligations to you."

"No, I do not so consider it; but there is one thing more, and pardon me for referring to it."

"Yes."

"When this is all over, when the end has come, I will have the body of your brother decently buried for your sake, and the grave marked so that it can be found if need be."

"The major has told me that there was a fortune left by your father, and to get possession of it you may wish to secure a certificate of his death."

"It is not necessary, Colonel Dunwoody, as my father left the entire estate to me, having disinherited my brother."

"I would have gladly shared it with him, had he changed his career, or given his share to his wife or children, had he married, which however he told me he had not done."

"If you will give him decent burial, sir, I shall be very grateful, and I desire to leave with you the funds necessary for—"

"No, no, Miss Arden, I will keep an account of the expenses and notify you at the proper time."

"But here comes the coach and farewells must be said."

Mrs. Lester, the major and Clarice then came forward, and all said farewell with deep regret,



The colonel handing the maiden to a seat upon the box by the side of Horseshoe Ned, who seemed proud to have his fair passenger again under his charge.

Then Ned gathered up his reins, called to his lenders, and away whirled the coach at a slapping pace, while the eyes of Ruth were seen to turn with a longing look toward the cabin where her brother was in irons, and must soon go forth from his prison to the gallows.

The coming of Ruth had created much comment.

Had she been an ordinary person it would have been less thought of.

But all who saw her recognized the lady at once, and more she was very beautiful, and her manner strangely fascinating.

Her coming carried out the old saying that no man is so vile but has one good woman to love him.

She had bravely met her brother, had done all in her power to cheer him and then had gone her way.

It would have been only harmful to her and to him for her to have remained longer, as all agreed.

She had shown her good sense in going.

As the coach rolled away Surgeon Frank Powell and Buffalo Bill were standing near the latter's quarters.

"Bill, she is really going," said the surgeon, as he saw Ruth upon the box with Horseshoe Ned.

"So it seems, Doc."

"What you said to her must have frightened her off."

"You mean about being aware that she came here to rescue the prisoner?"

"Yes."

"It may be."

"She is really then the sister of that outlaw?"

"Oh yes; as there are no others in the secret, I can tell you now that the miner, Deadshot Dean, told me as much."

"Well, she is a brave, noble girl; but here she comes."

The coach rolled by just then and both Surgeon Powell and Buffalo Bill raised their hats, a salutation which Ruth returned with a very gracious bow.

They watched the coach until it left the stockade through the gateway, and then Buffalo Bill said:

"Doc?"

"Yes, Bill."

"I am on the trail of knowledge."

"Well?"

"I wish to see what she is going to do?"

"Miss Arden?"

"Exactly."

"She can do nothing else than go East now, for Deadshot Dean said he intended taking her with him."

"She may, and she may not go East."

"No one in the fort knows her, other than you and I, as Bonnie Belle of Pocket City, for she has guarded that secret I am sure."

"Yes, wholly."

"Now she may go back to Pocket City?"

"Suppose she does?"

"She came here to rescue her brother beyond all doubt, and finding that you were aware of that fact, having recognized her, she has gone her way."

"Very wisely."

"That remains to be seen."

"What are you driving at, Bill?"

"Well, that woman idolizes that wicked brother of hers, and all the miners in Yellow Dust Valley idolize her."

"Did she wish to make a dash and rescue her brother she could get every man in the valley to follow her lead, so I am going to see just what her destination is."

"A good idea," responded Doctor Powell, and half an hour after Buffalo Bill rode away from the fort following the trail of the stage-coach.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### AN OBSTACLE IN THE TRAIL.

"THEY is two dandies from 'wayback, n'est-ce pas?" Such had been Horseshoe Ned's comment regarding Surgeon Powell and Buffalo Bill as the coach rolled by them.

"Who are they?" innocently asked Ruth.

"The one in fatigue uniform is Doctor Frank Powell, miss, better known as the Surgeon Scout, for he's one of the best Injun-fighters and trailers on the plains, and no man has had a more dangerous life than he has lived."

"He's a dead shot, and don't know no more what fear is than I does about preachin' the Gospel."

"The other ain't no squarer and better man in the Wild West than White Beaver, as the Injuns calls him, nor a better surgeon, scout and all around man either."

"You certainly give him a most delightful recommendation, Horseshoe Ned; but, who is the one in buckskin and the broad sombrero who was talking to him?"

"That are Buffalo Bill."

"Yes, I have heard of him, as I have also of the Surgeon Scout, for they are known everywhere, it seems, through their deeds."

"Yes, miss, they are, for a fact."

"Buffalo Bill is chief of scouts at the fort, and he is a man to tie to when one needs a friend."

"It war them two, if you'll pardon me for saying it, along with the miner from Pocket City, that captured Silk Ribbon Sam and his gang, and stopped highway robbery on this trail."

"Then you think there will now be no more holding up of coaches on the Overland?"

"Not on the trail I runs, miss, I'm thinking."

So on the coach went along its way, Horseshoe Ned delighted at exhibiting his skill as a driver and striving hard to keep Ruth from dwelling upon the fact that she had parted with her brother forever.

Just as the coach drove down into Deep Dell Brook, where it had been last held up and Ribbons had been killed, Horseshoe Ned said:

"I tells yer, miss, it's a comfort ter feel yer kin halt in the stream ter water your horses and not be expecting a shot all the time."

"Yes, for you have risked dangers enough to enjoy some sense of security now," was Ruth's answer.

But hardly had the words been uttered when suddenly down the trail beyond, leading into the stream, rode a horseman.

He was dressed in black, but rode a snow-white horse, though all of his trappings were of sable hue.

The horseman was masked, and wore a black sombrero, but his hair fell in heavy waves upon his broad shoulders, concealing even his neck, while, as he wore gauntlet gloves, no one could have told from his appearance whether he was pale-face, Indian, Chinese or negro.

"Hands up, Horseshoe Ned, for you carry a rich prize," cried the horseman, as he reached the water's edge, and leveled his rifle at the driver.

"Waal, I'll be eternally roasted, ef that don't beat all, for I were just sayin' the trail were clear o' varmints like you."

"Silence!"

"Hold on there, my pretty lady, for I'll send a bullet through your brain as quickly as I would shoot Horseshoe Ned, if you attempt to show your claws," sternly cried the highwayman.

This command was caused by seeing the action of Ruth, for she had drawn toward her a small valise she had behind her upon the top of the coach, and in which she had a revolver, which had before rendered her good service.

Not expecting a hold-up, she had not kept the weapon near her.

There was something in the tone of the man that indicated his intention to be as good as his word, and Ruth raised her hand from the sachel.

"Say, robber, if yer don't consider me rude, I'd like ter ask yer who yer be, for I thought the old gang had been wiped out?"

"The old gang was, but I have come to hunt the trails, and I am here to stay."

"That lady is well fixed, as I happen to know, so I will trouble her for her money, and all else of value she may have with her."

"If she refuses, I will kill you, Horseshoe Ned, and hold her a captive until she pays far more than I can now rob her of."

"I hope you both understand the situation."

"I understand you is a thief I'd like ter get a rope onto once," growled the driver, while Ruth said:

"Yes, I understand the situation perfectly, Sir Robber."

"You have the power to rob me, and so I submit to your brute force only."

"I have with me considerable money, a thousand dollars perhaps, and some jewelry, as you have said, and I will give all up if you demand it, but I would like to ask to keep a little money, and several trinkets, which, of little value to you, are most valuable to me from association."

"May I keep these and a hundred dollars in money?"

It would seem that few could resist this appeal, but the robber had the power and he meant to use it.

"No, not a dollar, or anything of value shall you keep."

"I risk my life to rob and I demand all, so give it up, or I draw trigger on Horseshoe Ned and you are my captive."

"Come, no nonsense, so hand over your wealth," and the robber rode nearer to the coach.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### CRACK SHOTS.

THE man who had halted the coach moved nearer to it, riding into the stream to do so.

The team of horses looked at him askance as though appreciating the situation, while the face of Horseshoe Ned grew black with rage.

"Ter think I can't protect her," he muttered.

To have his fair passenger robbed of her money and jewels while in his keeping was a terrible thought to the driver.

Yet he was powerless to protect her, as the slightest resistance on his part meant instant death to him.

So the road-agent, still covering the driver with his rifle, rode nearer to the coach.

"You will force me to give up all?" said Ruth, in a voice that showed she was deeply moved.

"Every dollar and valuable you has along," was the stern rejoinder.

"Then I suppose there is no help for me," and she opened the sachel and placed her hand within it.

"None, my pretty miss, for I need all you have and more too."

"Then take all that I have to give?"

As the words were uttered the hand came quickly out of the sachel, it was thrust forward and a sharp report followed.

With a cry of pain the road-agent dropped his rifle into the stream, for his right arm was shattered, and then with a savage oath he dropped his left hand upon his revolver on his hip.

But quickly a second shot rung out, and un mindful of the plunging team, which brought all of Horseshoe Ned's energies to bear to stop them from turning short around in the stream, the bullet was truly aimed and the left arm dropped to his side, the weapon falling into the water.

"My God, miss, don't kill me!" cried the road-agent, and he wheeled his horse by a movement of his body and a word, to dash away.

"I hate to harm that beautiful animal, but he must not escape," cried Ruth, now thoroughly aroused, and for the third time her revolver was raised.

A quick glance along the barrel and the third shot rung out.

Although the horse was bounding up the hill at full speed the aim was true and the animal dropped upon his knees, stumbled and went down, throwing his rider hard.

"I'll catch him, miss, if you can hold the team," cried Horseshoe Ned, after giving vent to a wild yell of admiration for the girl's crack shooting and the success she had met with.

But as he spoke there came a rushing sound behind them, a plunge and a horseman was crossing the stream with mighty leaps.

"Buffalo Bill!" yelled Horseshoe Ned wildly, and in an instant the scout had crossed the stream and was by the side of the wounded outlaw.

"Don't kill me, for I cannot resist," said the road-agent, faintly.

Snatching the mask from his face, Buffalo Bill said:

"Ah, I know that face."

"You are the one of Silk Lasso Sam's band, who escaped."

"Ho, Ned, you did some crack shooting here, even if you did not kill him."

"It wasn't me did it, Buffalo Bill," responded Ned, who had now driven up to the spot.

"Not you?"

"Nary."

"Who then?"

"This young leddy, and she knows how ter use a gun, says I."

"I did not wish to kill him, so broke his right arm."

"Then, as he drew a revolver with his left, I sent a bullet through that, and my third shot was to bring down his horse to prevent his escape."

"Well, miss, you are a crack shot, and the fellow is the last one of Silk Lasso Sam's band, so that now there will be a clear trail to travel, I guess."

"I will have you take him on with you, Horseshoe Ned, and bring him back to the fort with you on your next run."

"I'll die if I am not cared for," groaned the man.

"Well, if I was in your place, pard, I'd want to die, as yer'll hang as sart'in as I knows yer name," put in Horseshoe Ned.

"I did no harm," whined the man.

"Oh, no, yer didn't, but it wasn't your fault all the same, for yer intended ter rob this young lady and threatened to shoot her, too."

"Well, Ned, I'll do the best I can for his wounds until you reach the station where the doctor can care for him, and you must be particular that he does not escape."

"Yer won't go along then, Bill?"

"No, for I am on a little scouting expedition I cannot neglect."

"I heard your shots, Miss Arden, so rode on to see what was the matter."

"I congratulate you upon your nerve and splendid shooting."

"I thank you, sir, for praise from such a man as Buffalo Bill is worth having."

"It was just splendid the way she did it, Bill," said Horseshoe Ned, who now, with the scout, set to work to dress the wounds of the road-agent.

Taking from her sachel several handkerchiefs Ruth tore them into strips for bandages and aided in dressing the wounds which she had made.

At last the work was done, the road-agent was placed in the coach and the doors secured firmly, and his traps were placed on the top.

Mounting the box again with Horseshoe Ned, Ruth said good-by to Buffalo Bill and the team moved on once more.

But after waiting for some little time, Buffalo Bill mounted and rode on after the coach.



## CHAPTER XXVII.

## CAUGHT IN THE ACT.

BUFFALO BILL followed on the trail of the coach, with no desire to be seen again by the woman whom he was watching.

He had not intended to be seen, only the firing had quickly taken him to the rescue.

"If she goes back to Pocket City she means mischief of some kind, for having failed to rescue her brother by strategy she will do so by force I feel sure."

"If she was really the ally of her brother it is certain that the outlaw she wounded did not know it, for no look passed between them that I could see, and she would not have fired on him had she known him."

"I would find it hard to believe that Bonnie Belle is in league with outlaws."

Thus mused the scout as he rode on after the coach.

It was night when he reached the station where Horseshoe Ned's run ended, and he went at once to the hotel.

He found Ned there and learned that his passenger had taken the outgoing coach eastward.

"That settles it," mused the scout.

"She goes East and not to Pocket City, for she has given up the idea of rescue as impossible."

"Poor girl, I pity her, and only wish she loved one in some way worthy of her deep regard."

Then he said:

"Well, Ned, what do you think of Miss Arden?"

"I think she is just the dandiest girl I ever crossed the trail of, Bill."

"What a team she and Miss Clarice Carr would make together, for that's another one I sets great store by."

"But, Bill, if yer hed seen Miss Arden work up that leetle racket to a climax yer'd hev died of joy."

"Yer see I give up all for gone, when she talked ther same way and invited that sarprint ter take ther things."

"She opened ther sachel and out come a gun, and oh my!"

"Bill, she's ther dearest shot I ever seen, barrin' you and Surgeon Powell."

"She has nerve of an uncommon order, Ned, and she sends a bullet to dead center."

"But where is your prisoner?"

"He's in ther tavern under guard, the doctor havin' fixed up his wounds."

"Are they very bad?"

"Ther leetle bone in his right arm were smashed, and ther bullet grazed the one in his left, but he'll be well enough to hang with t'others of ther gang, for it's his neck we wants in prime condition for ther occasion."

"But whar is you goin', Bill?"

"I thought I would ride on here and see if you needed any aid going back with your man?"

"No indeed, for I'll tie him on the box with me; but I'll be glad of your company, Bill, if you will go along."

"Thank you, no, for I'll continue on in my scouting along the range to-morrow."

Staying that night at the tavern Buffalo Bill left bright and early the next morning, taking the trail for Yellow Dust Valley.

He was well-mounted and it was not yet sunset when he rode by the lonely cabin of the miner, Deadshot Dean, where he had so nearly lost his life at the hands of the desperadoes who had captured him as Silk Lasso Sam.

The cabin was closed and doubly locked and an air of desolation and desertion was upon all.

The scout had hitched his horse down in the valley and walked up to the cabin.

Going to the rear of it, around the cliff he stood gazing at the fine view from that point until suddenly he heard blows toward the cabin.

Quickly he made his way there and felt sure that some one was striving to break in.

Voices reached his ear too, for one said:

"Yer hain't moved her, Jerry, so let me get a whack at her, as I fer one don't intend ter be caught in this neighborhood arter dark, fer this is too near ther Hangman's Gulch ter suit me."

"And it don't please me a little bit."

"Take ther ax and let fly, for thar's money inside I is dead sart'in," was the reply.

The scout placed his foot on the projecting ends of the logs and quickly ascended to the roof, which was nearly flat and of boards on top of logs, slanting toward the cliff under which the cabin stood.

He drew a revolver in each hand, knelt down and peeping over saw the two men hard at work to break in the door.

So far they had made no impression upon either the locks or the door, and covering both of them with a revolver Buffalo Bill said, sternly:

"Hands up, pards, for I want you both!"

The voice coming from over their heads, and just after their expressed dread of being so near Hangman's Gulch when night came on, brought from the lips of each man a cry of fright.

They shrunk back, looked up and saw their danger.

"Hands up, I say!" roared Buffalo Bill.

Quickly they obeyed, and in an instant the scout had leaped down from the roof and confronted them.

"Breaking into Deadshot Dean's home, are you?"

"Well, I am glad I happened along at this time, for the miner is a friend of mine, and I guess you are citizens who will not be missed if you are called suddenly away from Pocket City."

"I'll take your weapons, sir," and the scout slipped the revolver and knife from the belt of one of the men.

"And yours too," and the second one was disarmed.

"Hain't you Buffalo Bill?"

"So I am called."

"Waal, I might have knowed it, fer yer is allus around when yer hain't wanted."

"I'm a scout you know," was the smiling answer.

"Waal, what does yer treat us this way fer?"

"When I get you to Pocket City it is more than likely you'll find out," was the scout's significant reply.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## A BAD RECORD.

THE two housebreakers did not relish the reply of Buffalo Bill.

They felt that they were in dangerous hands and had been caught in an act that would not be tolerated in Gold-Dust Valley.

It would never do to be taken into Pocket City as prisoners.

Their reputations there were of a very unsavory character, and miners were quick to resent an injustice.

They must get away at all costs, for an enraged border crowd was hard to manage and would only argue the matter over after they were hanged.

"I say, Buffalo Bill, this is a darned good joke," said one of the prisoners.

"What is?"

"Your making us prisoners."

"Yes, it is funny."

"I doesn't see ther joke," growled the other.

"You hain't the sense of humor that your companion has, for he sees it," said the scout.

"But I means this, Pard Buffalo Bill, we was sent here by Deadshot Dean ter git somethings for him, and as he hed lost his key he told us ter knock in ther door, don't yer see?"

"I see where you did the knocking, yes."

"Now jist go with us ter Deadshot Dean, and he'll say it's all right."

"Where is he?"

"Up ther canyon thar."

"We'll show yer."

"Look here, Deadshot Dean went East weeks ago, and you cannot play any bluff game on me."

"I tells yer ther truth."

"You couldn't tell the truth, either one of you, except by accident."

"No, I am going to Pocket City and you go with me."

"I caught you breaking into the cabin of an absent miner, and I shall so report to the miners and give you up to them."

"They'll hang us."

"That is your misfortune, not my fault."

"And we so innocent," whined one.

"See here, Buffalo Bill, we don't want ter hand in our chips no more than you does, so if yer plays quits with us we'll divvy."

"What will you divide?"

"I've got nigh a thousand in money here with me, and Jerry have got about half as much, so you kin hev all if yer'll let us go."

"Yes, all of fifteen hundred dollars."

"Well, it is more money than I make in a year with chief of scouts' pay, but if it was ten times as much, you could not bribe me to do a mean act."

"I know you are two scamps, whom hanging would be only justice, and as I caught you housebreaking, I'll so report your acts."

"Come, you go with me."

"Stand close up behind this man, sir."

"Tom, we is goners."

"Dead sart'in, Jerry."

Having placed the men at close step, Buffalo Bill buckled their belts together, and fastened them about their waists.

"I'll carry ther weapons, Buffalo Bill."

"No, thank you, Jerry, I can do so," was the smiling reply.

Shouldering the ax and iron bar the two men had brought with them, and sticking their weapons in his belt, until he looked like a walking arsenal, Buffalo Bill made his prisoners march down the hill before him.

There he found his horse, and mounting, ordered the men to face toward Pocket City and march.

They did so with low curses and whines.

It was just before sunset, as they passed Hangman's Gulch, and they glanced up into the dark recesses of the canyon, with many a misgiving that they would soon be more intimately acquainted with the weird and dreaded spot.

Just as twilight was falling, the scout heard the supper-horn of The Frying Pan Hotel, and from that moment a stream of humanity began to pour out of the mines and cabins, and flow toward the rendezvous of the miners on every night.

They quickly caught sight of Buffalo Bill, whose handsome face and form were seldom seen in Yellow Dust Valley, and beholding his prisoners, they began to call out, in many an odd question, as to what it meant.

"Ho, Tom and Jerry, what's up?"

"Hain't thet Buf'ler Bill?"

"What has yer got 'em in limbo fer, pard?"

"Has they been robbin' a hen-roost?"

"Say, pard, what has they been up ter?"

"Is yer goin' ter hang 'em?"

"They'll be no loss."

"How did yer git yer foot inter it, Tom and Jerry?"

Such questions flowed too fast for replies, and though the scout remained silent the two prisoners tried to explain but were constantly cut off by fresh questions.

At last a commanding voice said:

"Ho, scout, what have those fellows been doing?"

The speaker was a storekeeper in the camps and a man of considerable prominence, being captain of the Vigilantes.

He stood in front of The Frying Pan, where he had gone to get his supper.

"I was coming along the valley, sir, near Deadshot Dean's cabin, and went up to take a look at it, when I saw those two men trying to break in the door."

"Here is the ax and bar they used."

"I climbed upon the roof and had them where I wanted them, so made them prisoners, determined to bring them to Pocket City and turn them over to the miners, with a statement of the facts."

"They have a very bad record, sir, and have got their heads at last into the noose."

"Remember, Tom and Jerry, it has not been a week since I warned you that you were getting to the end of your rope."

"You, sir, I am told, are Buffalo Bill, chief of scouts at Pioneer Post?"

"I am, sir."

"Then turn over your prisoners to me for trial by our miners' laws, sir, for I am Scott Kindon, captain of Vigilantes and proprietor of the Miners' Market, as my store is called."

"I am glad to meet you, Buffalo Bill, so dismount and be my guest at the hotel to-night."

## CHAPTER XXIX.

## "ACCORDING TO LAW AND GOSPII."

INVITED as he was by the Vigilante captain, to become his guest at The Frying Pan, Buffalo Bill could not decline, so he dismounted and led his horse to the stables.

He was shown to a pleasant room, where he freshened up for supper, and found every attention bestowed upon him by the clerk whom Bonnie Belle had left to manage her affairs in her absence, and who seemed anxious to treat the scout well.

Bonnie Belle's quarters were all securely locked up in her absence, but otherwise the hotel was in full blast and the Vigilante captain and Buffalo Bill sat down to a very tempting supper.

The prisoners had been placed in safe hands, and with their guards were eating supper near, so the scout had an opportunity to see how much kindness was bestowed upon the two men.

"You see the boys wish to do the best they can for them, as they regard them as dying men," explained the storekeeper.

"Dying men?"

"Well it amounts to that as we shall try them after supper and that means a verdict of guilty."

"What, is the use of trying them if the verdict is assured?" asked Buffalo Bill with a smile.

"Well, for effect."

"You caught them trying to break into Deadshot Dean's cabin and rob it, and you brought here with you the implements they used, while you bear testimony to their guilt."

"True, but why not run them out of the camps, under penalty of death if they return?"

"That would never do, for of course every fellow that is run out has a purse made up for him by the sympathetic miners, and hereafter every man that wanted money would do some act to be sent away for, whereas if we try these men, find them guilty and hang them, Pocket City will rid itself of two notorious scoundrels and their end will serve as a wholesome lesson for others."

"Well, if they are all you say they are they deserve hanging, yet I suppose it would have been better for me to have taken them to the fort to get justice."

"They will get justice here, for we will try them by the law of right."

"Now let us go and arrange for the trial."

"Need I appear in the matter, sir?"

"Well, as I am judge, I'll ask you to take a seat with me on the bench."

"You are very kind, sir; but I am only a witness."



"Well, you will have to face the prisoner and the crowd, so take a seat with me on the bench."

The "judge" evidently felt the importance of his position, and as he left the supper-room lighted his pipe and took up his position upon the piazza, where seats had already been placed for him and the prisoners.

The bench was one in reality, and Buffalo Bill sat down next to the judge, while the prisoners were placed in front of them.

The crowd had now increased to several hundred men, yet they were not noisy, and their silence was more expressive than their shouting would have been.

The prisoners were white with fear, for they sat where the light of a number of lanterns fell full upon them.

They cast uneasy glances at the judge, baleful ones at Buffalo Bill, and pleading ones over the crowd, where they looked in vain for some sympathetic face.

The Vigilante captain called the meeting to order by rapping with his bowie-knife upon the bench.

It was as effective however as a golden gavel in Congress would have been.

Instantly there was a deathlike silence.

"Gentlemen," began the Vigilante captain, after clearing his throat:

"You have honored me by making me captain of the Vigilantes of Yellow Dust Valley, and also have bestowed upon me the more honored title of Judge of the Criminal Court of Pocket City.

"Thus are many of us present who remember that Yellow Dust Valley was a very dangerous place of abode before the Vigilantes were organized, for lawlessness and disorder reigned supreme.

"But since they began to hunt down criminals and this court sentence them for their crimes, see the change.

"Why there has not been a murder in Pocket City for thirty-six hours.

"A short while since this gentleman occupying a seat upon the bench with me, was ambushed by a gang of desperadoes, and would have been hanged but for the intervention of our honored fellow-citizen, Deadshot Dean, now absent, who killed the ringleader and saved a valuable life.

"Two of that gang are now arraigned before you as prisoners, charged with another offense against law and order.

"This gentleman, my fellow-citizens, I desire to introduce to you as a man whose name has spread from pole to pole, from the rising to the setting sun, as you will know when I tell you that he is Buffalo Bill."

A wild roar like thunder answered the words of the judge, and Buffalo Bill arose and bowed to the compliment bestowed upon him.

"Now, gentlemen," resumed the judge:

"Let me tell you that on his way to Pocket City this evening Buffalo Bill saw a sight which I am going to ask him to relate to you."

Thus urged the scout arose and simply told his story as it is known to the reader.

Then the judge resumed:

"You have heard, gentlemen, and this case is tried according to law and Gospel, for as soon as we have heard your decision in the matter, and I can guess what it will be, I will pass sentence, after which I will read a chapter in the Bible and the Ten Commandments to the prisoners and end by singing the Doxology.

"Now, gentlemen, are these men guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty," came with another roar like thunder.

### CHAPTER XXX.

#### AT REST IN HANGMAN'S GULCH.

THE two prisoners fairly quaked under the angry response of guilty to the question of the judge, and Buffalo Bill quickly arose and signified his desire to speak.

The judge rapped for silence and said:

"We will hear what the great scout has to say."

"I would say, gentlemen, as a Government officer, it is my wish to have full justice done these men.

"It is true that I caught them robbing a miner's cabin, or attempting to do so; but, there are crimes far more heinous than that, and I beg that you will, in their case, give them as light a punishment as possible, for I am sure they will heed the warning they have had."

The words of the scout fell upon deaf ears, when he made an appeal for mercy.

He might as well attempt to stem the current of a river as stay that mad element of humanity, for all eyes turned from him to the judge, who said:

"You have heard the appeal of our distinguished friend for mercy, and we will be merciful.

"As these men have been unanimously pronounced guilty, our mercy will be not to long keep them in the agony of their approaching doom, and hence I do hereby sentence them to be taken within the hour to Hangman's Gulch, and there to be hanged by the neck until all life

shall leave them, for the good order of this community must and shall be preserved."

Again a roar greeted these words, and once more rapping for silence the judge said:

"Officers, do your duty."

The two guards stepped forward, and over the head of each prisoner placed a noose.

Then the judge opened the Bible and read, just why Buffalo Bill did not know, the story of Daniel in the Den of Lions.

This he followed with the Ten Commandments, dwelling particularly upon the Eighth:

"Thou shalt not steal."

And making it more impressive by the question put to the prisoners as to whether they heard it or not, and repeating it to them.

Following this three hundred voices sung the Doxology, and then the judge arose, and locking his arm in Buffalo Bill's, led the way to Hangman's Gulch.

Buffalo Bill would not have dared refuse to go, and well he knew it, so he submitted in silence.

The guards and their prisoners followed, the twelve men who were to draw the doomed men into mid-air, each grasping the rope of their respective victim.

A slow and solemn step was kept to Hangman's Gulch, the many lanterns casting flickering shadows, as they marched along.

At last the place was reached, already dotted with the graves of many men who had thus been tried and executed.

Into the dark, loathsome, weird place they filed, and soon approached the gallows where so many others had died.

The two prisoners were moaning, like men in physical pain, for they were cowards at heart.

Then they began to plead for mercy.

But as well might they have appealed to the cliffs about them as to that crowd, for while some there were doubtless merciful, they were too greatly in the minority to dare speak what they felt.

The ropes were thrown over the beam, which was greased, and, at a signal from the judge, the twelve men upon each line drew their victims up into mid-air, silencing their cries for mercy.

Then, back from Hangman's Gulch surged the crowd, laughing and talking as they went over the affair, and it was generally agreed that Pocket City would be the better for the hanging.

The Vigilante captain felt that he had done his duty, so repaired to his store in a very self-satisfied humor, while Buffalo Bill accompanied him for a short time, and began, in a quiet way, to question him about Bonnie Belle.

All he could learn was the fact that not a man in Yellow Dust Valley was there to say one word against her, all holding her as above reproach.

Nothing was known of her antecedents, and there was not the slightest suspicion that she was connected in any way with the road-agents under Silk Lasso Sam.

She had gone East upon some business of her own, the storekeeper said, and Deadshot Dean the miner had been her escort, and not aware that the latter was a married man Scott Kindon hinted that he believed there was a strong feeling of friendship between the two.

This might result in marriage and the "judge" hoped that it would, as the miner was a splendid fellow in his opinion.

"Then, learning that the driver of the stage-coach was in Pocket City that night, Buffalo Bill sought him out.

He found him at the Devil's Den having just won all the money at poker which his adversary had.

He greeted the scout pleasantly, said that he had come in a couple of hours before and was glad to feel that the trail was free of outlaws.

"I wish to ask you, Pard Sandy, something about Bonnie Belle?" said Buffalo Bill.

At once Sandy was all attention.

"Waal, pard, what kin I tell yer?"

"You took her in your coach when she went East?"

"Sure."

"And the miner?"

"Deadshot Dean?"

"Yes."

"He went along too."

"Where did you leave them?"

"Waal, she left me at the trail junction."

"And the miner?"

"He went on East on the regular coach."

"And Bonnie Belle?"

"She took the upper branch trail via Omaha."

"East?"

"Yes."

And this answer caused Buffalo Bill to ponder deeply.

### CHAPTER XXXI.

#### BUFFALO BILL ON A STILL HUNT.

THE manner in which Buffalo Bill meditated was thus:

Now Bonnie Belle surely started East.

Why then did she leave Deadshot Dan at the

Overland junction and take the upper trail which led her through Chicago?

Why did she turn back unless she had received some word from the fort, where her brother was a prisoner?

Texas Jack, he recalled, had gone off on a special mission, which had not been reported to him.

He would inquire if Texas Jack had been to Pocket City.

So he asked Sandy if he had seen Texas Jack.

"Oh yes."

"Where?"

"He came to Pocket City, and then followed on after the coach."

"Why?"

"He had a letter for Bonnie Belle."

"From where?"

"The fort."

"From whom?"

"I don't know."

"He had overtaken the coach?"

"Yes."

"Did he deliver the letter?"

"He did, pard."

"And receive an answer?"

"Not a written one, pard."

"A verbal answer?"

"Yes."

"Do you know what it was?"

"I heard her say, 'Tell him simply that I will.'"

"Ah! and then?"

"Texas Jack went back on the trail and I drove on with my passengers, Deadshot Dean leaving me by one trail at the junction and Bonnie Belle going by the upper trail."

"And you did not hear of her passing back over the trail?"

"See here, Buffalo Bill, you is chief of scouts at Pioneer Post I knows well, and you has a right ter ask all questions of me, but I wants ter say if it's ter get Bonnie Belle inter trouble, I'll be a dumb man, sart'in, and don't you fer-git it."

"Pard Sandy, that little woman has no better friend than I am, and I would protect, rather than do one act to cause her trouble; but I am on a secret trail, which I wish to see the end of, and you can help me by answering my questions and perhaps save much trouble, for I believe there is a plot on hand to rescue Silk Lasso Sam and his men by force, and you surely do not wish to see those devils again turned loose upon the trails more revengeful than ever?"

"I does not, and I thanks you for being square with me, Buffalo Bill."

"The fact is I did not hear of Bonnie Belle's going West ag'in, but I happen to know that she did go, and that's all I can tell you."

"Well, I'll ask no more, Sandy, to-night at least."

"Good-night," and Buffalo Bill remained in the Devil's Den while the driver left it with his winnings in his pocket and quite satisfied with having won two months' pay within an hour, never taking into consideration that he had lost far more in the past few weeks.

The scout was the cynosure of all eyes as he leisurely strolled about the gambling saloon, going from table to table, risking a few dollars at faro, and winning, then being equally as lucky at roulette, rouge et noir and dice-throwing, when he received a challenge from a miner to play him a game of cards.

"Oh, yes, I'll play if you wish, though I had not intended to when I came in," said the scout.

"Waal, I plays for big stakes and don't you forgit," was the answer of the challenger.

Buffalo Bill took his measure in a steady look at him.

He thought that his face was familiar, but he was not sure, for he could not recall where he had seen him before.

He was a man even larger than the scout, for he was more brawny, weighing over two hundred pounds and as hard as iron.

His face was bearded, his hair worn long and he carried no knife in his belt, but instead four revolvers, two in front and one on each hip, so that no matter where he dropped his hand it must fall upon the butt of a "gun."

He wore no superfluous clothing either, his miner's shirt, corduroy pants, top-boots and slouch hat, pulled down over his eyes about making up his wardrobe.

The carrying of four revolvers had gained him the name of "Pistols," and that he knew how to use them, too, several graves upon Sunset Hill gave testimony.

He was peacefully inclined when not drinking, but when under the influence of liquor his best friends avoided him religiously, and those who saw him challenge Buffalo Bill to play cards felt that the scout had made a mistake in accepting, for they discovered that Pistols was drinking, and that meant a row they were certain.

In answer to the remark of the man that he played for big stakes Buffalo Bill asked in his quiet way:

"What do you call big stakes, pard?"

"What does I call big stakes?"

"Yes, that is the question I asked."



"Waal, I call a game without a limit big money."

"Are you able to stand a game without a limit?"

"Is I?"

"Ask my pards if I can't call yer at a thousand and pay if I loses."

"Oh, a thousand is your limit then?"

"Can you match me?"

"If I could not I would not play with you; but when you said without limit, I wished to know what you meant, as you can size my pile at a thousand."

"Now you know what I can do, so say whether you will play or back down?"

"Back down?" yelled the miner, savagely.

"Yes," was the perfectly calm response.

"I never backs down ag'in' any odds."

"Then play," said Buffalo Bill, in the coolest manner possible.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### WATERED WHISKY.

THE interest in the games going on in Devil's Den very quickly were centered in the match between Buffalo Bill and Pistols.

"I'm out for scalps," the miner had said in a voice that was heard all over the saloon.

At this Buffalo Bill looked him squarely in the face and there was something in the look that controlled the man, and he said:

"I see now that you have been drinking."

"Had I suspected this I would not have played with you, for I never play with a drunken man."

"Behave yourself now, or quit before trouble follows."

There was that in the words and look which mastered the man, for he made at first no reply; but then he said:

"What did I say to make you mad?"

"Nothing, for I am not angry; but you said you were out for scalps, and I wish you to understand that I take the same trail when there is need for it."

The man appeared cowed, for he said:

"We don't want trouble, Buffalo Bill, so shall I git a fresh pack of cards and will yer take a drink?"

"Thank you, I do not care to drink, and you take my advice and let it alone."

"But get the cards."

An angry gleam came into the eyes of Pistols.

But he made no reply and walked to the bar after a fresh pack of cards.

"Shuffle, give me a fresh pack and some whisky too," he said.

"Here's the cards, Pistols, but take my advice and don't drink any more, for Buffalo Bill is a stranger here," said Shuffles.

"Waal, he wants ter git better acquainted with ther folks."

"Whisky, I said, straight, strong and blistering."

Had Bonnie Belle been there he would have refused.

But to do the best he could he took a half-empty bottle, hastily poured water into it and set it before the man, hoping to have him get but half the quantity.

The miner found it out, held it up to the lamp and looked at.

"Is this pale sherry, Shuffles?"

"It's whisky."

"You lies, for you have drowned it with water, so you kin hev it."

Quick as a flash he dashed the stuff full into the face of poor Shuffles, who, blinded and maddened, drew his revolver and fired a shot at random.

It was the last act of his life, for he dropped dead with a bullet in his brain, while Pistols called out:

"He put water into my whisky, pards, and then shot at me, so I kilt him."

"Thar he lies behind the bar."

To put water in whisky was a criminal offense which the miners of Yellow Dust Valley could not forgive or forget, and so Shuffles lost the sympathy of the crowd by his heinous act, while Pistols rose in their estimation for visiting just punishment upon one who would do such a thing.

"Now, Pard Studley, I wants some whisky," and Pistols turned to the bartender nearest, who quickly placed a fresh bottle before him, while the miner took the other which had caused the trouble and dashing it against the wall at the rear of the bar shattered it to atoms.

"Yer shan't pizen no one else with watered whisky," he said.

Then turning to those who had gathered about him he said:

"Jine me, folks, in a leetle berage, for I'm bettin' high it will be ther Simon-pure article."

"Does yer catch on?"

They "caught on" with alacrity, and with the upturned pallid face of Shuffles, the eyes wide open staring into his own, Pistols poured his glass full to the brim and dashed it down his capacious throat.

A hush had fallen upon the crowd during this scene, and a few of the timid ones, or rather

those who wished to avoid being in a row, silently withdrew from the building.

There were several who felt that Buffalo Bill was making a sad mistake in having accepted the challenge of Pistols, while others knew that had he not done so, in the then temper of the man, a row would have been precipitated at once, for he would certainly have insulted the scout then and there.

A few now hastened to tell Buffalo Bill, who had not risen from his seat, that Pistols had just killed Shuffles, and had then taken a tumbler full of whisky, so was in a dangerous mood and having braced himself up to the right pitch by the liquor he would seek an encounter.

"He didn't have quite enough ter brace him fer trouble with you, pard, for he has heard o' you, as we all has, and that's why he got more."

"He's primed now and will go off like a hair-trigger," a miner said.

"Yas, so jist go out and let him alone," another added.

Buffalo Bill smiled serenely.

It was a smile that some who saw it felt boded mischief.

Then he said, complacently:

"I never seek trouble, gentlemen, unless I am after a man I know needs running down, and duty compels me."

"I sought no trouble with your comrade, and merely accepted his challenge, so he can turn it into any game that suits his humor best."

"Here he comes now," cried a voice, and just then Pistols was seen approaching the table where Buffalo Bill sat, a cigar between his teeth.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### PISTOLS.

WITH a lurch Pistols dropped into his chair and glared at Buffalo Bill.

"I has come back!" he said.

"So I see."

"There's ther pack o' cards," and he tossed them upon the table.

Buffalo Bill picked them up, glanced at them, and said:

"Yes, they are all right."

"Did yer think I'd git any as wasn't?"

"Not being acquainted with you I didn't know."

"Waal, we'll git better acquainted, I'm thinking."

"Perhaps."

"Come, don't git skeered, fer I hain't goin' ter shoot, only I hed ter kill a feller over thar, just now, and I is loadin' my gun ag'in."

"You are very wise."

"Yer see he insulted me."

"I can hardly believe that possible."

There were a number who heard this reply who appreciated its sarcasm.

Pistols felt that there was a meaning in it he could not fathom, so he did not try, and said:

"Yes, he put water in my whisky."

"Did he not know you?"

"Yas, only he tried to play a underhand game on me."

"We has been mighty good friends, Shuffles and me, for he has twice saved my life, and he meant well toward me, I is sartin, fearin' I sh'd git too much, so he put water in my whisky, and I'd kill my brother fer a insult like that."

"I can believe you; but may he not have been only wounded?"

"Yer don't know me, pard, for I never wastes powder and lead, but shoots to kill."

"I is sorry my poor pard Shuffles committed suicide, for he should have know'd me well; but he's out o' misery now, and I'll pay all ther expenses of ther funeral and give him a beautiful send-off on ther trail ter glory, an' put up a stone over him with a inscription as a warnin' to them who puts water in whisky, which I drinks ter git all o' ther leetle devil out of it I kin."

"Does yer tumble?"

"Oh, yes; but do you still wish to play with me?"

"Does I?"

"Yes."

"Why, pard, I is in fer a game o' anything with you."

"Then let us begin."

The words were so quietly uttered, the look of the scout was so calm, that it checked the devil gaining the ascendancy of the man for a minute, for he saw that they meant:

"Whatever your game with me, begin when you please."

But he did not interpret it into that way of meaning, so said:

"All right, pard, I is ready."

The cards were shuffled, cut for the deal, and Buffalo Bill won.

Then the cards were thoroughly shuffled and the game was begun.

All who watched the two men, and they were all who could crowd about them, saw that the scout was as cool as an icicle, showing not the slightest dread of what any one who was near felt sure must end in a deadly encounter between the two players.

Buffalo Bill serenely smoked his cigar, his face remaining impassive, and yet those who watched him closely saw that his eyes were rather upon his adversary than his cards.

The game was played more carefully by Pistols than those who saw him believed possible, for he was cautious in all he did and leered maliciously at Buffalo Bill when he gained a point.

At last he seemed to brighten up and said:

"A hundred on my hand, Buffalo Bill."

"Mine is worth twice that sum."

"I'll add that more to mine."

"So will I," was the quiet response.

"I calls yer."

"Four aces," and Buffalo Bill laid the cards upon the table.

"Durn yer," said the miner without showing his hand and the scout pocketed the money.

That Pistols felt his loss was evident to all, for his face grew darker and an uglier look came into his eyes.

"Well, how much is your hand worth, Mister Pistols?" asked the scout when the climax of the second game came around.

"It's worth a hundred," and Pistols appeared confident then.

"No more?"

"Well, what is your hand worth?"

"Just five hundred dollars, no more no less."

The miner started. Could it be possible that the scout held a better hand than he did this time?

No, it could not be. The lightning would not strike twice in the same spot.

"I jist says show up to ther tune of five hundred."

Buffalo Bill put up the money he had just won, adding more to it and said:

"There, match that with five hundred."

The miner drew out a greasy buckskin bag and took out a roll of bills.

He counted out very slowly five hundred dollars, and it could be seen that very little remained in the bag.

"Thar she goes, and yer needn't squint at ther bag, fer thar is more whar thet come from."

"Now I'm thinkin' your money is mine, so show yer hand."

"Four aces," said the scout without the change of a muscle.

"Four aces!" roared the miner. "Four aces ag'in' my four kings! How comes that?"

"You dealt, pard, and were more generous to me than to yourself," and Buffalo Bill very quietly put the money in his pocket, while he said:

"I'll play you another game to give you a chance to win back your money, or lose more, if you wish it."

"There's but one more game I'll play with you, Buffalo Bill, and that's with these," and the miner quickly leveled his revolvers.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### TURNING THE TABLES.

THE miner's words and act at once cleared a lane behind Buffalo Bill and himself between the crowds that had gathered around.

But the act did not appear to disturb the scout.

If caught off his guard by the sudden drawing of his revolvers by Pistols, Buffalo Bill remained as cool as before, and said:

"Then you are willing to play a square game with me with revolvers, are you?"

"I is going ter play a game with you, yes, but there's others in it besides, for I has something to say to you, Buffalo Bill."

"Talk fast then, old man, for life's short, you know."

"Oh, it'll be short enough to you, when I tells what I knows ag'in' you."

"What do you know?"

"I knows that you was ther cause o' havin' two innocent men strung up in Hangman's Gulch this night."

"I only wish I'd been at ther hangin', for them wouldn't hev been ther men thet got choked."

"I am listening."

"But me and my pard, Dave Dunn, got in too late ter save them poor murdered men, and when I heard what had been done, says I, thet us Buffalo Bill will hev ter die ter-night, I'll jist be his heir by winning his money fu'st."

"So I axes yer ter play me."

"And I did?"

"Yas, for sure."

"And I became your heir, as you put it."

"So far."

"Well, what else?"

"A heap, for I wants ter let ther folks know thet Dave Dunn and me were up in ther range and seen you breakin' inter ther cabin' o' Dead-shot Dean."

A murmur went through the crowd at this, while Buffalo Bill said indifferently:

"Is that all?"

"Why I feel relieved, for I was afraid you were going to accuse me of cheating you."

"Oh, no, yer played square enough, for I was a-watchin' yer; but we seen yer breakin' inter



Deadshot's cabin, and Tom and Jerry caught her at it.

"But you was too soon for them, got them under ther muzzle of yer gun and trotted them off as housebreakers when you was the thief."

"Why did you not at once come to their rescue?" asked Buffalo Bill, when the uproar which these words created had in a measure subsided.

"We was up in Eagle Nest Mountain, and it took us a long time ter git down to ther valley and up to Pocket City."

"Then we found that ther folks hed believed you, Buffalo Bill, ag'in' them men and it were too late."

"So we talked it over and thar is jist a large-size community here ter-night as says you has got ter hang too."

"Why not make it by unanimous consent, Mister Pistols, for it would sound better when reported at the fort to Colonel Dunwoody?"

The crowd gave vent to a murmur of admiration at the scout's pluck.

He did not appear to be in the least degree disturbed by the danger he most certainly was in.

"Oh, I knows yer is game, and I has just seen thet yer kin bluff, but thet don't go now."

"What does?"

"Ropes is trumps."

"You intend to hang me then?"

"We does."

"Without judge or jury?"

"We have set on your case and it is ag'in' yer."

"When am I to be hanged, please?"

"Afore dawn."

"Isn't that crowding matters a little?"

"No more than you crowded it ag'in' them two poor boys as was hanged to-night."

"And you saw me break into Deadshot Dean's cabin?"

"I did."

"And the other witness?"

"Was Dave Dunn."

"I do not believe anybody here who has common sense will believe any such charge against me," said the scout, while, with his elbows resting upon the table at which he sat, Pistols held his revolver in both of his hands, and covering the heart of the scout.

"Yer don't believe it?"

"No, I don't."

"Pards, does I tell the truth?"

In his excitement the miner turned his head, and in that instant his revolver was struck upward and knocked from his hands by Buffalo Bill, who now held him covered with his weapon.

"A turn about is fair play, Mister Pistols."

Some laughed at this, but Pistols swore roundly, yet dared not move, for he saw he was caught, the left hand of the scout lying upon his own weapon where it had fallen upon the table, the right holding his revolver within a foot of his eyes.

But the words of the miner had been answered by a savage chorus of voices, crying:

"You is right, Pard Pistols, for Buffalo Bill is the guilty man."

Still the pluck of the scout did not desert him, and he never changed expression at the outburst.

Encouraged by the cries of his comrades, though under cover of the scout's pistol, the miner said:

"See here, Buffalo Bill, you has half a hundred guns on you, but we don't intend ter shoot yer, but hang yer, as you got poor Tom and Jerry strung up, so up with yer hands, mighty quick, says I."

"Yes, up with your hands, Buffalo Bill!" shouted the crowd, savagely, while scores of revolvers covered the scout as he still sat at table, facing the ringleader, whom he yet held his revolver upon, the muzzle within a foot of his eyes.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### A SOLDIER APPEARS ON THE SCENE.

It certainly did look bad for Buffalo Bill, and for two reasons.

First, the charge of Pistols, backed by Dave Dunn, a reputable miner, seemed to be believed by a great many of those present.

Second, the crowd that backed Pistols was not only numerous, but composed of the very worst element in the mines.

This shut off many who felt that the accusation was utterly false, from lending any aid.

Pistols was certainly in danger of instant death at the hands of the scout, but the latter was equally in danger of sudden death from the backers of his accuser.

Thus the situation rested until Buffalo Bill broke the silence with:

"See here, Pistols, I recall that ugly face of yours, now that I get a better look at it, and I remember you as one of Powder Face Pete's gang who ambushed me some time ago, under pretense that I was Silk Lasso Sam."

"You wished to get rid of me then, because I make this country too hot for just such men as you and your ilk are."

"Now, what are you going to do about it, Mister Pistols, for if I am facing death, you are just as close as I am to it, so begin business when you please, and you'll find that I'll never hang, and dying, will take company along, so as not to get too lonesome on the trail across the Dark River."

The splendid pluck of Buffalo Bill, at bay against a crowd, delighted many present.

But those who surrounded him were his foes, and the better element hung back, feeling that a terrible scene must follow the first shot fired.

Pistols felt his situation keenly.

The danger had sobered him, and his desire was to be able to see Buffalo Bill hanged by the crowd, and it began to look as though he would not be there to witness it.

This he did not want, and he felt how certain death was to him if his comrades pushed the scout to extremes.

Such was the situation, and the suspense to all was fearful, and especially to Pistols and the scout, though the latter was, as a miner expressed it to a pard:

"Beautifully serene."

What the result would have been was assured, for the crowd was becoming restless, and there were those who did not love Pistols and so would push matters to a climax to get him killed that they might then hang the scout.

But, just as it seemed that another instant must come a crash, a loud, stern voice rung out with:

"What does this mean, holding a Government officer under your guns?"

"Room here, men!" and hurling men right and left by his giant strength as though they were children, the Surgeon Scout strode to the side of Buffalo Bill, who still sat at the table, covering the miner with his revolver.

A perfect yell of joy burst from many in the crowd, who thus gave vent to their pent-up feelings as they saw the splendid form of Frank Powell, the Surgeon Scout, in uniform, stride into the midst of the scene.

"Ah, Doc, just in time to keep me from killing this gent, and being made a target myself for half a hundred bullets," said Buffalo Bill, still unmoved by his rescue.

"It seems that I am just in time, Bill, and if I mistake not there are men in this crowd who will dangle at a rope's end for this work, if they harm a hair of your head."

"What does it mean?"

The ugly element in the crowd was still paramount.

It had only received a temporary check by the coming of the Surgeon Scout.

The greatest number of the miners present were now, however, decidedly upon the side of law and order, but the devil in the nature of the others was destined to lead them on to trouble.

They did not care whether Pistols died or not at the hands of Buffalo Bill. They hated Bill and his Body-guard because they were the foes of the bad element in the mines.

They hated the army because it put down lawlessness.

Here was a chance to wipe out the chief of scouts and Surgeon Powell, both of whom they stood in the greatest awe of.

They, this ugly element, were sixty to two, and they had nothing to lose.

The army would sweep down upon the Yellow Dust Valley of course, but who could be found who was guilty, who could be punished?

Thus the men who had backed Pistols argued, and with a desire for a row, a wish to sacrifice Buffalo Bill and the Surgeon Scout, and enough whisky in them to make them reckless of consequences, they began to crowd closely upon the center of attraction, where Cody sat still covering Pistols, and with the Surgeon Scout by his side, a revolver in each hand.

It was a most critical moment, for the officer and the scout saw that the authority of the latter was going to be defied.

"Men, don't mind what Brass Buttons says, for as he's chipped inter the game, he goes with Buffalo Bill."

"Don't shoot, for that means innocent men hurt, but capter them two game-cocks alive and hang 'em."

"Does I say right?" and the burly ruffian who had constituted himself leader gazed at the crowd with a look that demanded recognition.

The yell that greeted his words showed the temper of the crowd, which began to sway to and fro wildly, preparing for a rush upon the two men now at bay.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### AN UNLOOKED-FOR RESCUE.

"I AM sorry you came, Frank, for it only brings you into a tight place," said Buffalo Bill in a low tone to the Surgeon Scout, and he at once drew a second revolver from his belt to have it ready, though he did not take his eyes off of the miner whom he covered.

"I don't mind it, Bill, and I'm always ready to die, if need be, for a comrade."

"If they make a rush, kill that man, then stand back to back with me and let us make a

record before we go under," was Frank Powell's response.

"I'm with you until sunset, Frank," rejoined Cody, and he added, addressing the miner:

"You started this circus, Mister Pistols, but you won't see the end of it."

"Cuss you, I'll call 'em off if you'll call it quits," returned Pistols eagerly, now thoroughly terrified when he saw another leader in the field who meant to precipitate matters independent of him.

"Pard, you talk in your sleep, for you could no more call off that pack than you could tell the truth."

"No, you set the tune and the song must be sung through."

In the mean while the Surgeon Scout was watching the wildly swaying crowd, which were gradually drawing closer about them, and he was just about to open fire when there suddenly rung out a clear voice above the noisy hum:

"Hold! What does this mean, I should like to know?"

Instantly there was silence, intense in that it followed such an uproar.

Then hats were doffed, the crowd swayed apart and toward the table where Buffalo Bill still held the miner under cover of his revolver, and the Surgeon Scout stood at bay by his side, glided Bonnie Belle.

She was dressed in a blue dress, trimmed with silver braid, wore a slouch hat with a heavy sable plume and carried a revolver in each hand.

Behind her came Sandy the driver of the Overland, and then Scott Kindon the captain of the Vigilantes.

But, Bonnie Belle neither needed aid, nor asked it.

Her simple presence commanded respect.

They had deemed her far away in the East, and like an apparition she had glided through the door she always entered by, and her white face, now stern and threatening, showed that she was in no humor to trifle with.

"Ah, Surgeon Powell, it is you, and you also, Buffalo Bill, whom these roughs hold at bay?"

"And for what?"

"I was scouting, Bonnie Belle, and came upon two men, Tom and Jerry they called them, breaking into Deadshot Dean's cabin."

"I made them prisoners, brought them here and the Vigilantes hanged them."

"To-night this man, whom I have covered, accused me of breaking into the cabin, and he was not long in getting willing hands to hang me, and but for the coming of Surgeon Powell it would have been over ere this."

"And I only checked the trouble for a few minutes, Bonnie Belle, as the men turned upon me, also."

"I took Buffalo Bill's trail and followed him here, for somehow I feared he might need aid."

"You have saved us both by your timely coming, unless these gentlemen wish to push their quarrel to a conclusion."

But, the gentlemen did not seem to be so inclined, or, if they did the words of Bonnie Belle checked them, for she said sternly:

"No, there will be no trouble here, for the man who raises a weapon against you I will kill."

"As for you, Pistols, if you ever enter my hotel or this saloon again, I will see that you do not do so a second time."

"Shuffles, do you hear what I say about this man?"

A silence most fearful followed, and as no answer came Bonnie Belle called again!

"Shuffles!"

"If you are calling your man left in charge here, Bonnie Belle, he is dead," said Buffalo Bill, as no one else seemed to care to speak.

"Shuffles dead?" she repeated with a start.

"Yes."

"When did he die?"

"To-night."

"Ha! he was killed?"

"Ask one of your men here to tell you about it, Bonnie Belle."

She called a bartender and was told the story.

She listened in silence, making no comment, and then turned to Scott Kindon and asked:

"Captain, is this not a case of murder?"

"It looks so, Bonnie Belle."

"This man Pistols has been carrying too high a hand for the safety and comfort of the good citizens in Yellow Dust Valley and it appears to me that he needs disciplining by the Vigilantes."

"Say the word, Bonnie Belle, and he travels the trail to Hangman's Gulch," the Vigilante captain said very decidedly.

Bonnie Belle was lost for a moment in thought, while Pistols gazed at her with a look of pleading and despair commingled.

At last she spoke:

"No, Captain Kindon, I will not say the word, for I wish no man's life upon my conscience, where it can be avoided."

"The mines will be the better for the taking off of those men, Tom and Jerry, and it would make it more respectable to rid us of this man Pistols."

"He has no mine or claim here, carries his fortune with him, I believe, so give him until sunrise to get out of the camps, while, that he may not be lonesome, let this man who was leading



the attack upon Surgeon Powell and Buffalo Bill go with him.

"Shall it be so, comrades?" and Bonnie Belle glanced over the crowd which answered with a yell that nearly raised the roof.

#### CHAPTER XXXVII.

##### A MIDNIGHT INTERVIEW.

PISTOLS was too happy to escape with his life to grumble at anything that might be put upon him, and he was but too anxious to get away from the saloon and start upon his exile, feeling that there was safety only in placing many miles between himself and Yellow Dust Valley.

Dave Dunn, the other alleged witness against Buffalo Bill, had been led into making the charge by his comrade Pistols, and seeing how matters were going, had slipped out of Devil's Den and hastened to his cabin to prepare for an immediate farewell to Pocket City.

The burly fellow who had made himself a leader against Surgeon Powell would have been glad to have escaped the notice of Bonnie Belle.

But her words had brought the eyes of the Vigilantes upon him, and he was anxious to get away, and so with Pistols skulked out into the darkness.

They had hastened to their respective quarters then, making an agreement to meet at Dave Dunn's in half an hour's time, and when the sun rose the two were making tracks down the valley, carrying their belongings upon a pole slung between two of them, and with all the wealth they possessed in their pockets.

"I would like to see you and Buffalo Bill, Surgeon Powell," Bonnie Belle had said in a low tone.

"We are going at once to the hotel."

"I will see you there," and Bonnie Belle circled about the room, greeted everywhere with the most cordial welcome.

In the mean while Surgeon Powell and Buffalo Bill were congratulated on all sides by those who had not shown the nerve to come to their rescue.

But they received all that was said coldly, gauging it at about what it was worth, and passed out of the saloon on to the hotel.

The scout already had a room there, and the surgeon was given one next to him, and so they repaired to them at once.

"It came over me, Bill, to follow you and I might be of service."

"I am not superstitious, as you know, but I had a dream in which I saw you in a close place with Indians about you, and when I awoke it was all so vivid to me that I wrote the colonel a note and started upon your trail without waiting until dawn."

"I went on to the end of Horseshoe Ned's run, and he told me you were going down to Pocket City, so here I came."

"And just in time, Frank, to save my life."

"It seems so."

"I was told you were here so I went over to the Den and saw what was going on, so chipped in only too quick."

"But though I postponed matters for awhile, we both would have been food for coyotes at this present time, had not Bonnie Belle arrived as she did."

"And how did she come?"

"I do not know."

"She started East from the Junction."

"Well, she came here instead, fortunately for us—Come in!"

A Chinese servant entered and said:

"Missee say 'Melican man come with Chinaman."

This invitation was promptly accepted by the surgeon and the scout, and they were led by the Chinaman to the private quarters of Bonnie Belle.

There she had a supper spread out for them, though it was after one o'clock, and receiving them cordially said:

"I wish to have a talk with you, gentlemen, and you will join me at supper, please."

They readily consented, the Chinaman waiting upon the table, and Bonnie Belle showing herself to be a most charming hostess.

The supper being over, and the Chinaman having departed, Bonnie Belle banded her guests a couple of fine cigars and said:

"I enjoy the fragrance of tobacco smoke, for to me a good cigar is fragrant, so please light them."

They did as told and then Bonnie Belle threw herself into an easy-chair in a tired way and said:

"I am really fatigued, for I have had a long ride since leaving the fort."

"I knew that you were upon my trail, Buffalo Bill, and I am glad that you were, as you came up in time to have served both Horseshoe Ned and myself well, but for the fact that our enemy had already been placed *hors de combat*."

"Yes, you are fully able to protect yourself, Bonnie Belle," said the scout.

"And others too," remarked Surgeon Powell.

"Well, as I wished to throw you off the scent I went on eastward by stage; but only for a couple of stations, where I secured a horse and guide, going across country to head off Sandy on his way here."

"I caught his coach and made him promise not to tell of my arrival, so he drove, as there were no other passengers, at once to the stables and I got out there and ran to my rooms here."

"It was Sandy who heard of the row in the Den and he came for me, just as I intended going into the saloon as a surprise."

"Now I have a favor to ask of both of you."

"Granted before asked," said Surgeon Powell.

"Ditto," responded Buffalo Bill.

#### CHAPTER XXXVIII.

##### THE FAVOR GRANTED.

"You are very kind, to offer to grant me a favor without knowing what it is."

"Suppose I ask you something that you can not conscientiously do?" said Bonnie Belle with a smile.

"That is impossible, for you would not ask anything of us which we can not conscientiously do," was the response of the surgeon.

"It is not too much to ask, I feel."

"It would have to be much indeed for us to refuse you, Bonnie Belle, for both of us owe you our lives, and you may be sure, if not profuse in thanks, we appreciate all that we are under obligations to you for," and Surgeon Powell's manner was really sincere.

"Do not speak of what I did, for one does not deserve either thanks or gratitude for doing one's duty."

"No, I only wished to ask you both not to betray me."

"Not to betray you?"

"Yes, for no one knows here, except you two gentlemen, that I am the sister of the condemned outlaw, Silk Lasso Sam."

"Not a soul do I wish to know it."

"And no one shall through me."

"Nor through word of mine," added Buffalo Bill.

"I believe that Captain Caruth suspected me, and yet when I met him face to face at the fort he did not by any act show that he did."

"He simply looked as though he recalled Bonnie Belle in Miss Ruth Arden, and if so I wish that you would ask him also to keep my secret."

"I will."

"And he will do it."

"I do not care to have any one here know that I am the sister of the outlaw, for it would bring me under a suspicion here with many which I would not care for."

"Now I can do good, and I have a certain power over the wildest spirits here, which you had an opportunity to see yourselves to-night."

"We did indeed," said Buffalo Bill.

"And it was in our behalf."

"You have indeed wonderful power over the wild savages that congregate here in Pocket City, the surgeon remarked."

"As the sister of the outlaw chief, no matter how innocent I might be, you can well understand how I would lose my power."

"A wicked man might influence them, yet not a wicked woman."

"It is only by holding myself pure in all things that I retain my influence, and I wish to be so respected unto the end."

"You are a very remarkable woman, Bonnie Belle, and one whom both Cody and myself hold the highest respect for."

"Let me tell you, if it is a pleasure for you to know it, that you are most highly respected and admired by all at the fort, especially the warm friends you made in Colonel Dunwoody, Major and Mrs. Lester and Miss Carr."

"Did they know you as Bonnie Belle they would not change their opinions in one iota regarding you."

"But, I can well understand that this community knowing you to be the sister of Silk Lasso Sam, would at once suspect you of being secretly his ally in wrong-doing, so your secret shall be kept."

"I thank you most sincerely, Surgeon Powell."

"And permit me to say, Bonnie Belle, that I switch off your trail at once."

"I followed, for I believed that you intended to rescue your brother," said Buffalo Bill.

"I believed that you went to the fort to accomplish it by strategy, and finding yourself thwarted gave it up."

"Then, I frankly confess, my idea was that you intended to accomplish by force what you had failed to do by strategy, that is, secure a number of men here who would follow your lead and thus rescue your brother."

"No, I would not accomplish his rescue, save his life even, by the taking of another life."

"What I could not accomplish by strategy I would not do by force."

"I can believe that of you now, since what you have done and said to-night."

"Let me tell you, Buffalo Bill, what I could have done to-night," said Bonnie Belle eagerly.

"Yes."

"I could have seized both you and Surgeon Powell, sent you into hiding where your best scouts could not have found you, and there have held you as hostages to be given in exchange for my brother, or put to death if he was executed."

"You are right, for you surely could have done that."

"Without doubt," added Frank Powell.

"But I would not do so, and I would not be known as connected with the outlaw in any way, and I thank you both for your promise not to betray me."

"It is late now, so I will say good-night, and I will be glad to have you breakfast with me at nine, for that will give you seven hours' sleep."

"Good-night."

They bowed themselves out, both impressed with the thought that they had stood in the presence of a very superior woman and one as pure as a pearl, in spite of her surroundings and the calling she followed as mistress of The Fry- ing Pan and the Devil's Den.

"Frank, I would not place a straw in the way of that girl to do her harm," said Buffalo Bill as the two friends reached their room.

"I would protect her from harm with my life, Bill," was the Surgeon Scout's rejoinder.

"Do you know she takes the coming execution of her brother, loving him as she does, very coolly?"

"Yes, Bill, and it sets me to thinking."

"And me."

"You have an idea?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"That she may accomplish by strategy after all the rescue of Silk Lasso Sam."

"It may be, for she is a very clever woman, and one dangerous to balk when she sets her mind upon carrying out a plot."

"She is indeed."

#### CHAPTER XXXIX.

##### CHARITY COVERS A MULTITUDE OF SINS.

THE morning dawned upon Yellow Dust Valley with Pistols, and Dave Dunn and their other ally, Maddox, making tracks out of the valley with an anxiety to place as many miles between themselves and the citizens of Pocket City in as short space of time as was possible.

Crowds are proverbially fickle, and the thought in the minds of the three fugitives was that the mob might decide to change its mind and hang them, when it came to attend the funeral of Shuffles whom Pistols had so wanonly shot.

While these three were keeping up a quick step for safety, as if by common consent, Pocket City was taking a holiday.

The miners had held open house at Devil's Den until very late, or rather early, for the gray of dawn was visible in the east when the doors of the saloon were at last closed.

Business had been good for the saloon, and bad for many a gambler, and the employees were anxious to get the accounts straightened out before Bonnie Belle examined the sales, expenses and profits.

Shuffles had been a universal favorite, for he was always polite, obliging and generous.

He could never refuse a poor devil a drink and would chalk the amount against himself, so that at the end of the month he would only have a small sum coming to him out of his wages.

Bonnie Belle had held the money back until just before her departure for the East, when she had placed him in charge of the saloon, and at the same time said to him:

"Shuffles, you have been here for several years, and Landlord Lazarus gave you the name of being a very honest man."

"In the past ten months you have charged to yourself nearly two-thirds of your wages for favors shown others who have never paid you."

"I have kept it back as I knew that it would be loaned away or spent."

"I now hold for you the sum of what those amounts are, and its total is a trifle over eight hundred dollars."

"When it reaches a thousand I shall send it to your mother of whom you have so often spoken to me, to keep for you, and who you say has a mortgage on her little farm which she and your two younger brothers are working hard to pay off."

"How much is that mortgage?"

Shuffles could hardly speak, his heart was so full of joy and gratitude.

But at last he faltered:

"It is eleven hundred dollars, miss, for I sent mother fifty dollars last week; but, oh! what can I do to thank you for your goodness to me?"

"Act as squarely by me as you have done in the past, and manage the Den for me until further instructions."

"I will, miss, I will."



And upon the very night of Bonnie Belle's return, poor Shuffles shuffled off this mortal coil, murdered for doing a kind act in preventing Pistols from getting drunk, unmindful of the terrible fate of a man who waters another man's whisky.

There was no contract between Bonnie Belle and her dead clerk, but the morning after his death she arose, and her first duty was to write a long letter to his mother, stating that he had been shot by a desperado, whom he had once saved from being killed, and was trying to save the life of.

She also stated that he should be buried with proper decency, and that his effects should be sent to her at once, by Express, along with twelve hundred dollars salary in her hands, due him, while a purse contributed by the miners she begged her acceptance of, as it would show in what esteem her dead son was held by those among whom he associated.

Not a word as to his calling, or a word to cast a shadow upon the mother's love for her son was written.

Bonnie Belle had just finished her letter, when Surgeon Powell and Buffalo Bill were ushered into her pleasant sitting-room, by Sly Cheek, the Chinaman, who deserved his name most certainly.

She welcomed them pleasantly, told them of her letter to Shuffles's mother, and added:

"Pocket City was up all night, so is resting now, for it is arranged to give poor Shuffles a grand funeral this afternoon."

"An itinerant organ-grinder was shot here some months ago, and his instrument has been pressed into service as a brass band, while a quartette of really fine voices are rehearsing a hymn which some clever fellow has discovered can be sung to the air of Tramp, Tramp the Boys are Marching, the chorus being an original one written by a poor poet here who gave up the pen for the pick and has made a failure with both."

"You surely will remain to the funeral, gentlemen, of poor Shuffles, for it would be a mark of respect the miners would never forget you for showing?"

"Outside of that inducement, Bonnie Belle, I would not miss it for the world," said the Surgeon Scout with enthusiasm.

"Yes, I know we should enjoy it," Buffalo Bill added absent-mindedly, his eyes upon a two-pound venison steak which Sly Cheek had just helped him to.

"Enjoy it, Buffalo Bill?" said Bonnie Belle reproachfully.

"No, I mean we should be delighted to attend, for if there is anything that will keep me away from church on a Sabbath day it is to attend a first class border funeral, when the chief mourner is generally the man who turned up the toes of the lamented corpse."

"We will see Shuffles laid to rest, Bonnie Belle, and, as you spoke of raising a purse for his mother, let me offer you now a hundred dollars of my winnings last night."

"Wait, please, until I call for the subscription, and then I will accept your very generous offer," was Bonnie Belle's response.

## CHAPTER XL.

### A BORDER BURIAL.

It was when the bugle sounded at noon, calling the miners to dinner at The Frying Pan, that Pocket City really awoke to the situation.

Scott Kingdon, the Vigilante captain, set the example of respect by closing his store and hanging in front of it a piece of black calico.

The Devil's Den had not been opened after its night closing, and the door had been tastefully draped by Bonnie Belle with crepe.

The body of Shuffles, dressed in his best, was laid out upon the piazza of The Frying Pan, in a coffin, which, though not a perfect fit, was at least a good covering for the dead.

A United States flag, brought into requisition on all occasions, was spread over the coffin, and the two miners stood guard over the remains, rifles in hand, and it is safe to predict that had Pistols put in an appearance then he would have been at once placed in the same position of the lamented Shuffles.

The crowd began to gather from one end of

the valley to the other, and miners came up with the hand-organ of the dead grinder in a wheelbarrow, one to furnish the means of locomotion while the other turned the crank.

Placing the organ at the foot of the coffin one of the miners began to play, and all during dinner such airs were ground out as:

"Johnny comes marching home," "The girl I left behind me," "A life on the ocean wave," "John Brown's body," and others more or less suited the occasion.

There were many extras who took dinner at The Frying Pan that day, so that the Chinese servants were kept busy; but there was enough for all, for Bonnie Belle kept a generously supplied table, and there was never heard the slightest murmur of discontent.

At last Bonnie Belle appeared upon the piazza, and, as the bars had all been closed, she looked upon a sober crowd, though not a few were still unsteady from the effects of drinking the night before.

At her appearance every head-gear was raised, for it would be a misnomer to designate them as hats, for they were sombreros, slouches, caps, coon-skin, and all other varieties.

There was the silence too that always greeted her, even the organ leaving its grinding.

She was dressed in black, slouch hat, sable plume and all, as a mark of respect, and carried in her hand a small basket.

"Comrades," she said with one of her sweetest smiles, and placing her hand gently upon the head of the dead man lying in the coffin.

"Comrades, I thank you all for coming here, for we are burying to-day a friend, one whom we can all call by that sacred name, a name so often abused."

"You know poor Shuffles as he was yesterday, the day before and always, true as steel, generous to a fault and a good man as far as he understood right and wrong."

"You know that he was murdered, while he sought to do a kindness."

"But you do not all know that he had a poor mother in the far-away State of Connecticut living upon a farm which she and her three sons were trying to free from debt."

"The oldest son lies here, dead, and no help will she ever get from him now."

"So it is that I ask you, in your generosity, to contribute as you can and will, to the purse I wish to raise and send to her."

"One of our guests here, Buffalo Bill, was the first to volunteer, and most liberally, and he was followed by his comrade in arms, Surgeon Frank Powell, and now I ask all to come forward and contribute their mite, be it ever so little."

She turned to Buffalo Bill and he dropped a roll of bills into the basket, Surgeon Powell did the same, and then the employees of The Frying Pan and Devil's Den followed, after which the miners came forward in a steady stream, while, not to be outdone, the Chinese servants "clubbed in" for the mother of the dead "Melican Man."

"Surgeon Powell, will you please count this contribution and state to the donors just what it amounts to?" asked Bonnie Belle.

The Surgeon Scout obeyed, and answered:

"Gold-dust valued at five hundred dollars, bills amounting to four hundred and fifty, gold pieces, one hundred and sixty, and silver one hundred and forty, with a score of I. O. U.'s amounting to a hundred dollars."

"I will cash those I. O. U.'s and that makes a most generous contribution of thirteen hundred and fifty dollars," said Bonnie Belle.

This important ceremony over with, the pall-bearers were called, the body was taken up and the cortege started for Sunset Hill, Bonnie Belle escorted by Surgeon Powell and Buffalo Bill, and the miners following in fours, while the band-organ led the way with "The Campbells are Coming," and "John Brown's Body."

Arriving at the grave the hymn was sung by the quartette to the tune of "Tramp, Boys, Tramp," all joining in the original chorus written by the miner poet, with a will that sent a roar of melody down the valley to rebound from the distant cliffs with many an echo.

Then the body was lowered into the grave, while Surgeon Powell took up a shovel and said in his deep, sympathetic voice:

"We commit this body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust."

Then as all stood with bowed, uncovered heads there arose upon the air a voice full of melody and pathos singing:

"Nearer my God to Thee."

From beginning to end in her superb, rich tones, Bonnie Belle sung the beautiful hymn, and when the last word was uttered, tear-drops rolled across faces furrowed and brown which had not been wet with tears since childhood, and manly hearts heaved convulsively with emotions which overwhelmed them, and many a miner went to his cabin home from Sunset Hill a better man for the burial he had witnessed of poor Shuffles.

## CHAPTER XLI.

### A SISTER OF MERCY.

LET us now return to the fort, after the departure of Ruth Arden.

It has been seen how the coach was held up on the trail, at Deep Dell Brook, and that the road-agent quickly met his punishment at the hands of Ruth, whose shooting was the admiration of Horseshoe Ned, for he told the story over and over again at the station.

Buffalo Bill, it has also been seen, followed the trail until convinced that Ruth had gone East, and yet to make sure, he had gone to Pocket City where he had saved Dead-shot Dean's cabin from being broken into, and got Sam and Jerry into trouble for their lawless housebreaking.

Having had the dream he had, of Buffalo Bill being hemmed in by red-skins, Surgeon Powell, his staunch friend, had gone off upon his trail with a result already known to the reader.

The departure of the chief of scouts and the Surgeon Scout, so soon after the going of Ruth Arden, set a number in the fort to thinking what it could mean.

The visit of the young girl was discussed over and over again, not only in the officers' families, but at the clubs, and also in the barracks among the men and in the settlement adjoining the fort.

It seemed strange to outsiders that Colonel Dunwoody should be so attentive to the sister of an outlaw, and that Major Lester and his wife should have her for their guest while Clarice Carr had been seen so much with her.

At the officer's club the younger men hinted that it was a case of love at first sight with the colonel and all wondered just how it would turn out.

Certainly the colonel had made no effort thus far to get a pardon for the prisoner, even though doubtless urged to do so by the outlaw's beautiful sister.

There was one thing which Ruth had asked of Clarice Carr, and that was to see her brother and try and influence him for a better life, even though, as she said, she knew that he was under the shadow of the gallows, and that the day of his doom was drawing near.

In obedience to this wish, the day after the departure of Ruth, Clarice Carr obtained permission from the colonel to visit the prisoner.

It was given freely for her to go and come at will, as Ruth had asked it.

She accordingly went to the cabin, accompanied by Major Caruth, and the sentinel had orders to admit her.

Arden Leigh the outlaw sat there, as he had when his sister had visited him, taking matters very calmly.

He arose at her entrance, the clanking of his chains sounding very harsh in the ears of Clarice.

"Miss Carr, this is an honor I had not anticipated," he said, standing and motioning to her to take his seat.

"Your sister asked me to see you, and I have come to know if there is aught that I can do for you."

"It is more than kind of you, Miss Carr, as you are the one I plotted to rob of a large ransom."

"You have a good heart to forgive me"

"I only hope that all your sins may be



forgiven as readily as I forgive your sin against me, sir.

"But is there aught that you need that I can send to you?"

"Nothing."

"My wants are few and they will be but for a short while, as you know just one week from to-day I am to be hanged."

"So soon?"

"Yes, it is to be on Friday the thirteenth of the month."

"And are you prepared to die, Mr.—Mr.—Arden?"

"In what sense do you mean, Miss Carr?"

"Have you made your peace with God and man?"

"I leave my life to man, who will take it, and if I have a soul it must go to the keeping of God who gave it."

"Then you will not pray for forgiveness for your sins?"

"I will ask no mercy of a God whose laws I have outraged, and I ask nothing of man."

"I have taken human life, and I have committed every sin in the calendar of wickedness, I suppose."

"Yet all might have been different had my earlier years been shaped in a different way, Miss Carr."

"My mother was lenient and forgiving, my father allowed me free rein, and the only check I had upon my temper and temptations was my little sister, then too young to understand me, or guide me aright."

"When I fell in love with one who could have brought me back from the precipice I was upon, could have made a good man of me, ready to atone for the past in every way in my power, I found that she turned from me for the love of another, my rival, whom I hated."

"That was the turning-point of my life, Miss Carr, and from that day I made men and women alike fair game."

"You see what my evil life has brought me to, and as I do not believe in death-bed repentance, in outraging God and humanity, I will not now, when I can do nothing else, appeal for mercy for sins I committed with my eyes open, and without mercy to those who were my victims."

"As I have lived, so will I die, Miss Carr, without fear."

"Come and see me executed, will you not?" and Silk Lasso Sam smiled as sweetly as though the shadow of death hovered not over him.

#### CHAPTER XLII.

##### UNDER A VAIL.

CLARICE CARR was greatly shocked at the words and indifference of the doomed man to his fate, his execution upon the gallows, and his recklessness of pardon beyond the grave.

But she said, calmly and sincerely:

"Mr. Arden, though I would shun the scene in which you must be a sad and unfortunate actor soon, as I would shun an open grave, yet, if my presence there could add one atom of comfort to you, could smooth your last moments, as your sister's loving heart might, I would go with you willingly under the very shadow of the gallows, and be the last one to clasp your hand in farewell."

The man started at her words and half held out his manacled hands, while his face changed from its stern expression to one of softness.

"It is just such women as you, Miss Carr, who keep the world good, and my sister is one like you."

"Had I my life to live over again I would be a different man, but now I shall face the alternative unflinchingly, Miss Carr."

"I thank you for your kindness in coming to me, for it shows a forgiving spirit and sacrifice of self, and my sister will appreciate it I know."

Clarice could say no more to such a man.

She too was not one to believe that a man can sin at will, commit the most heinous of crimes, and then, when the law gets its clutch upon him and he can sin no more, when the shadow of death is upon him, that he can turn from his wickedness to prayer, to repentance, as a drowning man catches at a straw.

So she wisely did not linger, for what

could she tell such a man of sweet forgiveness and all that, or what could she say to console him in the face of the hangman fitting the noose for his neck.

"If you feel that I can serve you, Mr. Arden, send for me."

"I will send you some books to read, to cheer your lonely hours, and if there is anything we can prepare for you to eat we will gladly do so."

With this Clarice Carr left the cabin of the doomed outlaw.

She had done her duty, and unless he sent for her she would not care to see him again.

Should he send for her to cheer him in the last awful moment, she would go without the slightest hesitation.

Returning to her home she told Major Lester and his wife just what had occurred, and they too felt that she had done only what was right.

And yet the next evening the sentinel on duty at the cabin saw Miss Carr approaching.

He had had orders to admit Miss Carr at her will, and as she drew near, her face closely veiled, she said in a low tone:

"You have orders to admit Miss Carr, have you not, sentinel?"

"Yes, miss."

"Pass on!" and the sentinel resumed his steady pace to and fro, as soon, according to orders, he had taken the outer beat, some thirty paces away from the cabin.

"Ah, Miss Carr, you have come again to see me in my loneliness," said the prisoner, rising as the visitor entered.

The veil was thrown back and instead of Clarice Carr it was Nina De Sutro who stood before him.

"Nina! is it you?"

"Sil—"

"It is not for you to call me by that name where it might be heard."

"I am Miss De Sutro to you, as to others."

"Why this disguise in coming to see me?"

"Am I disguised?"

"You surely wear the dress and hat of Miss Carr, and a veil?"

"True, about the hat, and being veiled, for I borrowed the hat to trim one like it; the veil is mine, for I did not care to have my face seen, and the dress is Mrs. De Sutro's and is a match for one belonging to Clarice."

"But why?"

"Well, I do not intend to compromise myself, and I could find no excuse to ask to come and see you, so I decided upon strategy."

"You were anxious to see me then?"

"Nothing of the kind."

"Why did you come then?"

"Because I had to do so."

"Ah, a woman's reason."

"Yes, because."

"And you impersonated Miss Carr?"

"I did, for she has gone off with a party for a drive to the settlement, and you know that she got permission from Colonel Dunwoody to see you, as *your sister* asked it."

"You speak as though you did not believe it was my sister?"

"Yes, she said so."

"And you doubt her?"

"Oh no."

"What then?"

"I would believe anything she told me, for I never saw a truer, lovelier face, so unlike your own."

"Mine is stamped indelibly with crime."

"I am glad that you admit as much."

"But I went to see your sister."

"She refused to see any one."

"Very true, but I am no blunderer, and I went about it in a way that won."

"I hope you will not blunder when it comes to my rescue."

"That is why I have come to see you."

"Well?"

"I have come to tell you that I do not intend to rescue you, or even make the attempt," was the cool reply of the woman.

#### CHAPTER XLIII.

##### THE REFUSAL.

THE man started visibly at her words.

He gazed at her with a look which seemed to pierce to her very soul.

"Do you mean what you say?"

"I do."

"You do not intend to attempt my rescue?"

"I do not."

"You have changed your mind?"

"I have."

"For some reason?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"Well, I see no need of it."

"You do not?"

"I do not."

"You have thought of the consequences?"

"I have."

"You know that if I am not rescued I will only die upon the gallows?"

"Oh, yes."

"Still you refuse?"

"I do."

"You are aware of my threat?"

"To expose me?"

"Yes."

"To tell every one that you are my husband?"

"Yes."

"It will disgrace you."

"Oh, yes, in one sense of the word."

"And you do not care?"

"Well, not so much as I did."

"You are willing to be considered the wife of the outlaw, Silk Lasso Sam?"

"No, I am not willing."

"What then?"

"I cannot help myself."

"Then rescue me."

"I cannot."

"Then I shall keep my threat."

"All right."

"You seem indifferent?"

"I am not indifferent; but I shall, when I see that there is no help for it, go to Colonel Dunwoody with Lieutenant Colonel De Sutro and his wife and tell him the truth."

"You dare not."

"Oh, yes I dare."

"I shall have as witnesses Major and Mrs. Lester, Clarice Carr, Captain Caruth, Surgeon Frank Powell, Lieutenant Turpin and Buffalo Bill."

"I will tell my story as it was, Colonel De Sutro and his wife will vouch for it, and I will not only have the sympathy of all, but will be a heroine as well."

"You will be disgraced."

"No, for your sins will not be visited upon my head, and when you tell the story on the gallows, my prior confession will have taken the sting from it."

"I do not believe you will do it?"

"Then you do not know me."

"I cannot believe it."

"Why not, when I stand in fear of your intention to do so?"

"Then you would see me die?"

"You deserve death most certainly."

"Are you to be my judge?"

"Oh, no, you have been already judged and condemned."

"And my life will be upon your head, for you could save me if you would."

"I did not cause your capture."

"That is not the question."

"What is?"

"You would sacrifice me when you could save me."

"Let me tell you, Arden, for I believe that is your name, unless your sister is also sailing under false colors, that you sacrificed me without mercy, and would have been glad to have had me put an end to my life in my despair, or have gone utterly to the bad."

"It took me a long time to turn my love for you into the bitter hatred I feel for you now, and I will tell you the truth when I say that upon the night following the day of your death upon the gallows I will sleep as serenely as an infant, far more so than I would if you had escaped and I expected you to appear again in my life to work me evil."

"Woman, you are a beautiful devil."

"Thanks for the compliment, for it is not many who can be a devil and beautiful as well."

"You will not rest so easy as you say, for I swear that I will haunt you."

The woman laughed.

"I will appear before you with my blackened, anguish-writhing face, and my eyes will look into yours in the blackness of the



night, while your ears will be filled with my moans of despair.

"Ah! but I will haunt you, Nina De Sutro, until I drive you to despair, to madness, to death."

The man's face was livid now, for he felt all that he uttered.

But the woman was wholly unmoved.

She gazed fixedly at him a moment and said:

"Poor creature, you already haunt me while living."

"You will haunt me less when dead, for then you know, I will be a widow, and I can find some one else to love me even though I can never love him, for I'll tell you now that one reason why I do not attempt your rescue is because I have discovered that I cannot win the man whom I love, whom I feared to love by your confession that I were your wife."

"I see with wide open eyes, Arden, and I have seen that the man I sought to win, and believed that I could do so, is madly in love with your sister."

"With my sister?" gasped the outlaw.

"Oh, yes, with your beautiful sister."

"Where did he know her?"

"Only since she has been here."

"He knows her to be my sister?"

"Yes, and pitied her, and pity begets love, you know."

"Does he know aught else about her?"

"What else is there for him to know?"

"Only that she is pure, beautiful and good, a possessor of a fortune of her own, and mine, for I was disinherited, and that she is the sister of Silk Lasso Sam."

"I do not believe that he knows aught of her other than that her face shows her virtues, and her tongue has confessed to him the shame of being your sister," was the studied reply of Nina De Sutro.

#### CHAPTER XLIV.

##### THE LAST CHANCE.

THE outlaw was deeply impressed by what he had been told by Nina De Sutro about his sister.

Could it be really true that a man had fallen in love with his sister, knowing nothing more about her than that she was his sister?

"Yet when he remembered how lovely she was in face and form, how noble was her nature, and the imprint of her pure soul was stamped upon every feature, he did not wonder that she could win the love of any one."

At last, after a silence that began to be painful to Nina De Sutro, in spite of her nerve, and her daring defiance of the man, the outlaw said:

"I am remarkably situated, I think."

"How so?"

"Well, I have a beautiful wife, who has learned to love another man, who in his turn loves another."

"That other is my lovely sister, about whom all that is known is that she is the sister of Silk Lasso Sam."

"Well, it shows how unworthily two beautiful women have loved, for I simply apply to myself the praise you have bestowed, not to speak of many others."

"Oh, yes, you are beautiful—so is a serpent."

"Thanks."

"Now, to this man?"

"Who?"

"The one who you say has fallen in love with my sister."

"What of him?"

"That is what I wish to ask you, Miss De Sutro?"

"Well, he is a man in the true sense of the word, one of nature's noblemen, as they say in novels."

"He is handsome, too, has won a deserved name for gallantry on the field, and what is most remarkable, is popular with both men and women."

"He must be a saint, or a devil, for you know wicked men win women."

"Yes, I have had a very sad experience in that respect."

"But continue, please, with your description of your hero."

"There is little more to say other than that he has rank, is brilliant, fascinating and rich, so the idea of your sister's riches would not have influence with him."

"Who is this paragon?"

"The man I love."

"This from a wife to a husband?"

"Why not, from an outraged wife to a demon husband who has turned the purest love into the bitterest hate?"

"Yes, I do love him, and when I saw that he loved your sister then I decided, especially as I had another reason, that I would not raise a hand to save your neck."

"Who is this man?"

"One who has a sentiment."

"Years ago, when a young cadet, he saw a portrait in an art gallery of a face he became fascinated with."

"That portrait had been painted by a young artist of his lady-love; one whom he hopelessly loved, so the story went."

"He was refused and took to a life of dissipation to drown the anguish of his unrequited love."

"He went to the dogs, and at last, to buy rum parted with all he had left in the that portrait."

"It was put into an art exhibition by the purchaser and won the first prize, a gold medal and a thousand dollars."

"The purchaser hastened to the studio of the artist to give him the medal and share with him the prize-money, and found him sitting dead in his chair, his palette and brush still grasped in his hand."

"He had just finished painting a likeness of himself, seated at a table with death, a grim skeleton, throwing dice together, and with a decanter and glasses between them."

"The owner of the portrait was so impressed by the death of the young artist, and his last painting, entitled *The Last Chance*, that he sold them both to a dealer, for he took charge of the remains and had them decently buried."

"The purchaser of one of these portraits was the man I love, for he fell in love with the portrait of his ideal of womanhood and paid a large sum for it."

"He has it with him to-day."

"The other portrait was purchased by the artist's rival, who married the maiden who discarded him."

"Do you remember the story, Arden?"

"Perfectly, for the portrait was of my mother, of whom my sister was a perfect likeness, and my father purchased the painting of *The Last Chance*, and it is in the old homestead to-day."

"You are right, for so your sister told this man of whom I speak."

"He told me of the portrait, of his purchasing it, and the story he had heard regarding the artist."

"She at once told him the name of the artist, and more, that *The Last Chance* was her property, for the story was talked of last night in my presence."

"Having fallen in love with the portrait, keeping it as his ideal of a woman, when he met its counterpart, in your sister, he naturally loved her at once."

"Could I work against such a cruel Fate as that to win that man?"

"Oh, no, I know when I am defeated, and I gave up the game, for the cards were against me, and, though tempted, I would not commit a crime to win."

"Now shall I tell you who this man is that loved an ideal and found the real?"

"Yes."

"Colonel Dunwoody," was the answer.

#### CHAPTER XLV.

##### THE OTHER REASON.

"COLONEL DUNWOODY?" said the outlaw, in a tone of utter surprise, when he heard the name of the man who Nina De Sutro asserted was in love with his sister.

"Yes."

"I am surprised."

"Why so?"

"I had heard it said there was a dead romance in his life never to be resurrected."

"No, it was the romance of the portrait ideal."

"Had he never have met your sister, the reality of the ideal, I could have won him, though perhaps never the love I would have wanted, the love that I would have been satisfied with."

"You are very particular."

"Would that I had been more so in the past."

"Love is a lottery."

"Yes, I grant that; but what do you think of your brother-in-law in prospective, though of course you will never know him as such, having been hanged, by his order."

"Nonsense."

"Oh, no, sound sense."

"He will never wed Ruth."

"He will."

"She would never wed the man who signed my death-warrant, love him as she might ever so dearly."

"Ah! I had not thought of that."

"Then you do not know her nature."

"Well, he will sign your death-warrant and, now I come to recall her face, she would not marry the man whose signature was attached to it, so after all there may be a chance for me."

"Not the slightest."

"Why not?"

"Having loved an ideal and found her but to lose her, he would be true to his love of a memory and never marry another."

"I believe you are right again."

"You have been a close student of human nature, Arden."

"I have had reason to be."

"And you know something of Colonel Dunwoody?"

"I have heard of him often, and I had a chance to study him at my trial."

"He was severe?"

"On the contrary he was kind, for he treated me throughout like a man at his mercy, the under dog in the fight you know."

"That is his nature."

"He having caught me felt sorry for me, and was anxious to get me out of my misery for his sake and my own, it appeared to me."

"You were observant."

"I always am."

"But you give up, do you, that the man is lost to you?"

"I must."

"And you really believe that he loves my sister?"

"I know that he does."

"Then aid me to escape so that there can be no barrier to their union, for of all men I believe I would rather have her wed Colonel Dunwoody than any one I know, for he would make her a noble husband."

"I am sure of that."

"And you had better fish in other waters for a lover."

"I?"

"Yes, for there is Surgeon Frank Powell, Captain Dick Caruth, Buffalo Bill—and I'll name no others, for those three strike me as men worth striving for."

"If I were a woman I should love the three of them and Colonel Dunwoody too."

"Are you in earnest?"

"Indeed I am, for I have the happy faculty of admiring my foes."

"Now, I have always admired the man who was my rival in love, though I hate him and sought to kill him."

"To him, to Surgeon Powell and to Buffalo Bill I owe it that I am here now, and yet I cannot but like them immensely."

"There is Caruth too, the one who advocated hanging me, and I admire him also and thought he was perfectly right."

"I would have done as much for him had I had him in my place."

"You are a very remarkable man, Arden, and if you had devoted to good deeds the talent and energy you have to evil ones, you would have made a very great name."

"I have as it is, for Silk Lasso Sam the outlaw chief is the talk of barracks, camp-fire, stage station, mines, and in fact all along the frontier, while I am certainly greatly feared."

"And you are glad to be feared?"

"Why not, for if I cannot be loved I can be feared."

"But you had some other motive in deciding not to aid me to escape."

"Granted."

"What is the reason?"

"I may as well tell you."

"Certainly."

"Because there is another enlisted in your cause."

"What other?"

"Your sister."

"Ah! is she interesting herself in me to the extent of helping me escape?"



"You know that she is."

"May I ask how you got your information?"

"Well, I regard your sister as remarkable for a woman as you for a man."

"Well?"

"She came here for one purpose and that was to save you."

"I saw it in her face, though others only read that she had come to comfort you in your last hours."

"Convinced that you are in safe hands I shall make no other effort, and I am here to tell you so."

"I have enjoyed my talk with you, so now will say good-by, for I do not wish to attract attention to *Miss Carr* by my long stay, and I am masquerading as that young lady, you know."

"Good-by," and drawing her veil over her face *Nina De Sutro* turned to go when the outlaw said sternly:

"Hold!"

## CHAPTER XLVI.

### THE RETURN OF THE TWO SCOUTS.

**BUFFALO BILL** and **Surgeon Powell** were riding slowly upon the trail back to the fort.

They had left *Pocket City* early that morning, after passing another night there, and had ridden slowly along homeward, for the fort is the home of the soldier and the scout.

After the burial of *Shuffles* they had returned to *The Frying Pan*, where they were entertained by *Bonnie Belle* most delightfully, for she had sung for them, played the cornet, and been most agreeable in every way.

The *Devil's Den* had been kept closed out of respect for the dead manager, and a *Sabbath Day* stillness rested upon the camp.

The *Vigilante* opened his store to turn an honest penny, and the gambling-dens, for the *Devil's Den* did not have a monopoly by any means, had opened wide their doors, to catch those miners and loafers who would drop in.

The *Frying Pan* had fed an enormous crowd at supper and then settled down to rest.

One of the rules of *Bonnie Belle*, and which was religiously respected, was that the *Devil's Den* should never open on Sundays, and the miners seemed really glad of this respite from the noisy bustle of the place and the gambling and drinking which was sure to come.

The more that **Surgeon Powell** and **Buffalo Bill** saw of the strange woman who seemed to hold the destinies of *Pocket City* in her little hand, the more they were pleased with her, and mystified.

They knew that there was an unreadable page of her history to which she alone held the key.

She talked like one who had seen much of the world, young as she was, and conversed with **Surgeon Powell** with much knowledge upon the military strength of the different powers of Europe, and launched off into the fine arts with equal fluency.

She did not appear anxious to show her learning, yet understood well the political history of the country, and the faults and virtues of the different national parties.

Her reading had been varied and instructive, and she seemed glad of a chance to discuss something else than hotel fare, gambling and mining.

When the officer and scout bade her good-night and good-by, for they said they were to leave at an early hour the next morning, she asked, with a smile:

"And is this to swing around the circle, **Buffalo Bill**, and still play the detective upon me?"

"Indeed it is not," answered the scout, flushing like a girl at the insinuation.

"I am glad of it, for we must be friends, you know."

"We certainly shall be, if I am to have my way," said the scout, warmly.

"And we are also to be friends, **Doctor Powell**, for candidly, I will not do aught to cause either of you any trouble, and if I fight you, should anything turn up to cause me to do so, it shall be by strategy, not force."

"Then we may as well acknowledge ourselves beaten when we are to measure

strength in strategy with a woman," said **Surgeon Powell**.

"For shame, to acknowledge defeat before the combat."

"It is not like you, **Doctor Powell**."

"I am dealing with a woman now, *Bonnie Belle*, not a man."

"Well, do not you or **Buffalo Bill** track me, for it will do no good, I assure you."

"I know that you wish to thwart me in setting my brother free, and from your standpoint you are right."

"But all that I could do in the matter I have done."

"And failed?" said **Buffalo Bill** with a smile.

"I leave that for you to decide, gentlemen."

"But, good-night."

She grasped the hand of each in her frank way, and they left her.

When they went to pay their score, the clerk told them that there was no charge against them, as they were the guests of the fair mistress of *The Frying Pan*.

They could but accept the courtesy, and the clerk said that an early breakfast had been ordered for them.

"And so the next morning they turned their backs upon *Pocket City*, and took the trail for *Pioneer Post*."

Their way led by the *Hangman's Gulch*, and they turned in there to have a look at the numerous graves of the victims who had suffered there, dying at the end of a rope.

The two freshly made graves of *Tom* and *Jerry* were there, and as he looked at them, **Buffalo Bill** said:

"Twice have I come very near being placed here, *Frank*."

"You have indeed, *Bill*."

"Once *Deadshot Dean* saved me from *Powder Face Pete* and his gang, and you saved me the next time by your timely arrival, for those fellows intended hanging me."

"And *Bonnie Belle* saved us both, *Bill*," was the answer.

As they neared the fort they came in sight of the stage trail, and upon reaching it heard the rumbling of the coach behind them.

A few moments after the coach came in sight, and by the side of *Horseshoe Ned* a stranger sat upon the box.

## CHAPTER XLVII.

### AN OFFICER OF THE LAW.

"Ho, **Surgeon Powell**, how is yer, and you, too, *Bill*?" cried *Horseshoe Ned*, as the coach drew up to the two pards just as they came within sight of the fort.

"All right, thank you, *Ned*."

"Have you seen any road-agents this trip?" asked the *Surgeon Scout*.

"You bet I hain't on the run back, doctor, but I has a pilgrim inside who held me up when I was going east, as I guess **Buffalo Bill** told yer."

"Yes, he told me what a dead shot your lady passenger proved to be."

"Dead shot?"

"Now I should remark but she is, ther deadeest of ther dead shots and no mistake."

"She's one among a thousand and no harm said ag'in' t'others; but I guesses yer'll hev ter doctor him up, sir, for he's been in the hands o' that old *Pills* at ther station and maybe he don't know much about doctorin'."

"All right, *Horseshoe Ned*, I'll do all I can for him; but you appear to have several passengers along on this run?"

"You bet I has, sir, three passengers besides ther outlaw who is crippled in both arms."

"This gent ridin' with me I don't know by name, or I'd interdooce yer."

Thus urged the man riding on the box with *Horseshoe Ned* said:

"My name is, *Raymond*, sir, **Henry Raymond**."

"Ah, yes, I remembers hearing your pards call yer by thet name now."

"These gents, *Mr. Raymond*, is **Surgeon Powell** o' ther cavalry, and **Buffalo Bill** chief of scouts, and they is among ther best men thet ever is seen in these parts."

All bowed at the introduction, and the scouts kept up with the coach until it reached the fort.

The man who had given his name as *Raymond* was one who possessed the look of one to be depended on in a time of need.

He was well built, quick of action and had a dark, piercing eye that was most penetrating.

The other two passengers were heavily bearded men such as might be found anywhere on the frontier.

As **Henry Raymond** dismounted from the box he turned to **Surgeon Powell** who had just gotten off of his horse and said:

"You are an officer at the fort, I believe, sir?"

"Yes, the surgeon of the post."

"I would like to see the commandant, sir, **Colonel Dunwoody**?"

"I will conduct you to him if you wish."

"I thank you, sir," and the stranger joined the surgeon and the scout who were going to headquarters to report their return.

**Colonel Dunwoody** was seated upon the piazza of his headquarters smoking an after-dinner cigar and was alone when the party arrived, for the two other passengers had come along also, **Henry Raymond** remarking that they were friends of his.

"Ah, *Powell*, glad to see you back, and you too *Cody*, for after getting word that you had gone off on the trail of a dream I began to fear that after all the red-skins might have gotten hold of **Buffalo Bill**."

"No, sir, the red skins did not catch him, for we have not seen an Indian; but, strange to say, colonel, my dream was not all a dream after all, for I found him in a very tight place."

"But I'll explain later, as this gentleman whom *Horseshoe Ned* introduced as *Mr. Henry Raymond*, for he and his comrades came in on the coach, desires to see you, sir."

The colonel turned at once to the strangers, and said, addressing the leader of the three:

"How can I serve you, *Mr. Raymond*?"

"I desire, sir, to present my card and this letter, given me by *General S—*," said *Raymond*, and he handed over a card and letter.

The former had on it:

"HENRY RAYMOND,

"PINKERTON'S DETECTIVE AGENCY,

"Chicago, Ill."

The letter bore the official stamp of the military headquarters at *Chicago*, and was as follows:

"Sir:—

"A question having arisen between the civil and military authorities, regarding the right for you to hold and try the prisoner now in your keeping, known as *Silk Lasso Sam* the outlaw chief, and now under sentence of death, I have consulted the Attorney-General through the Secretary of War, and the result is that you are hereby ordered to turn over to Detective *Henry Raymond* the said prisoner, upon presenting to you the requisition from the Governor of the State of *Illinois* for his body, through the authorized officer of the law."

This letter was signed by the assistant adjutant-general for *General S—*, and the colonel read it over with an expression upon his face which was hard to fathom.

"You have the requisition, Detective *Raymond*, referred to in this letter?" asked the colonel quietly.

"I have, sir."

"Here it is, **Colonel Dunwoody**," and the detective at once presented an official-looking document which read as follows:

"Whereas *Austin Arden*, alias *Silk Lasso Sam*, having broken the laws of the State of *Illinois*, by the crimes of murder and robbery, I hereby make requisition of the military commander holding the said *Austin Arden* a prisoner, and under sentence of death by military court, to deliver to my authorized agent, *Henry Raymond*, detective, the body of the said *Austin Arden*, alias *Silk Lasso Sam*, for trial in the civil court of the State of *Illinois*."

"Signed," &c.

"The stage does not return for several days, Detective *Raymond*, and before its departure you shall receive my answer," said the **Colonel Dunwoody** after reading papers handed to him by the officer.

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

### THE TELLING BLOW.

WHEN *Silk Lasso Sam* called out as he did, in stern, peremptory tones to *Nina De Sutro*, she stopped at the door and turned toward him.

"Well, what do you wish?"



"This is all bosh about my sister making any effort to save me."

"I am sure that it is not."

"And I say it is."

"She did not come here for nothing."

"She came to see me to cheer and comfort me, and, if she saw a chance to aid me to do so."

"And she saw none?"

"How could she, a stranger in this fort, see what you cannot discover?"

"She came here to save you I am sure."

"If possible, and seeing that it was impossible she has gone, bidding me a last farewell and leaving me to my fate."

"It is not like her."

"It is all that she could do."

The man was silent after this, but his thoughts were busy.

He knew that Ruth had promised to do all in her power to save him, and had told him just what her plot was, just what to expect.

But, then, it might miscarry.

No plot was really certain, and big chances had to be taken to rescue him from the fort and all surrounding him.

Nina De Sutro was in the fort, and her guardian was next in rank to Colonel Dunwoody.

There was no better person anywhere to attempt the rescue, daring as it must be, than Nina De Sutro.

She had said that she would desert him, make no effort to carry out her former plans, and thus leave him to his fate.

This must not be, for if one failed to effect a rescue, the other must.

How could he urge Nina De Sutro to change her mind, when she had decided against making the effort?

It was something that needed thought, and yet he had no time to think it over.

If he let her go away from him then, she would take good care not to come again to see him.

He must find, therefore, some plan by which he could force her to act in his behalf.

What was that plan to be?

He did not know, but ventured upon an expedient, so said:

"You have an idea that if I were dead, and you my widow, that you could marry some good man?"

"I know that I could."

"Even Dunwoody, whom you love?"

"Perhaps yes, if he was prevented from marrying your sister through having signed your death-warrant."

"Yes, he might turn to you for comfort."

"I hope so."

"And failing in that quarter you could, perhaps, marry Captain Caruth?"

"I believe that I could," said the woman, who had received such an unlimited amount of adoration, she believed that she was capable of bringing any man to her feet, as in truth she was, with very rare exceptions.

"And failing with him you have Lieutenant Vassar Turpin to fall back upon?"

"Yes, all three of them splendid fellows, men whom any woman might feel proud to have the love of."

"I grant that with exceeding candor, yet must say that they are too honorable men, have too high regard for the proud records they have won, they honor the names they have inherited, unsullied by a stain, too much to ally their lives with one wholly unworthy of them."

"What do you mean?" and a strange look crept over the woman's face, a look that was reflected from the dark, malignant countenance of the man.

"I will tell you just what I mean, and what they shall know."

"I beg you to do so."

"I will, and only too soon for your ears to hear."

"In Heaven's name tell me!" and Nina De Sutro was beginning to feel that her nerves might be treacherous to her.

"May I ask," began Silk Lasso Sam with a most malignant look upon his face:

"If you have your certificate of marriage?"

"My what?"

"You heard me?"

"My marriage-certificate?" she gasped.

"Yes."

"Is it necessary?"

"Of course, for all well-regulated families have one."

"Where is mine?"

"That is what I asked you."

"You never gave me one."

"It was not for me to give it to you."

"Who then should?"

"The minister who performed the service should have given it to you."

"Why did he not, for I was so young and thoughtless?"

"I will tell you why he did not do so."

"Why?"

"Because he had no right to do so, for *he was no minister.*"

"Heaven have mercy upon me!"

"Not even Heaven will be merciful to one who cannot show her certificate of marriage."

"You lie, Arden, and you know that you do, for I am your wife, and I will yet get that certificate to prove it."

"You can never get what cannot be secured."

"That man was no preacher; he was under my pay and I paid him for his work."

"That is all there is to it, and so when I make known my story about you, as I face an attentive and appreciative audience, standing upon the gallows as I will, it will be my pleasure to state that Nina De Sutro has a right to her name, as my death will not even leave her *my widow.*"

"Do you see now, my beautiful Nina, just how you will stand in the eyes of these honorable gentlemen, for I shall add that you knew the fact from the very first—see?"

That she did see was proven by the moan that escaped her lips as she sunk in a heap at the feet of the man who had dealt her such a cruel blow.

## CHAPTER XLIX.

### BROUGHT TO BAY.

THERE was nothing for the outlaw to lose, everything for him to gain.

He was in durance vile, in double irons, closely guarded and doomed to a death at the rope's end.

The time was drawing near when he must die.

His sister had promised to save him, yet there might be a miscarriage of her plot.

In his despairing case it would not do to trust to one plan alone.

Nina De Sutro, disappointed at the discovery she had made regarding the colonel's love for Ruth, had grown reckless, almost desperate, and was willing that all should be known, rather than save the outlaw from death.

When, however, he told her what he would tell to dishonor her, she feared that she was forever lost and so sunk in a swoon at his feet.

He stood gazing upon her with the intensest delight in his expression, the cause of which was revealed by his muttered words:

"That will fetch her to terms."

He had told a falsehood, as he knew in his own guilty heart, for the marriage was a legal one, greatly to the man's regret afterward, and only his game of bluff had caused Nina, in her fear, to forget that the man was a priest, who performed the ceremony, and that the marriage was registered upon the books of the parish church where it was celebrated.

Without one effort to help her, Silk Lasso Sam stood gazing upon the form lying all in a heap.

"She'll come round soon," he muttered.

And he was right.

In a short while there was a convulsive twitching of the muscles, then color rushed back into the face and the eyes opened.

They beheld her surroundings and after an effort she arose to her feet.

She faced him then, at first weak and tottering, but gaining strength and nerve rapidly.

Her face had become white now with intense passion, and through her shut teeth, she hissed forth:

"You have conquered again, Arden, and by the most accursed act that ever a man was guilty of."

"I am a Mexican, and women of my race have hot blood that is bitterly revengeful."

"It seems idle to threaten a man who

stands in your position, with the noose of the hangman about his neck, but yet I now long for you to live that I may make you feel how Nina De Sutro can avenge an insult, a crime upon her."

"Yes, I wish you to live, it is my earnest desire that you should, and I will live with the hope of making you suffer."

"You will aid me to escape then?" asked the man, impressed in spite of himself at the words and looks of the woman.

"I will."

"You will not disappoint me?"

"No."

"Remember, failure means my death."

"I understand."

"When will you do this?"

"I do not know."

"How?"

"I do not know."

"Why not as you planned it before?"

"Because the officer I spoke of is on the sick list and does not go on duty as I supposed he would."

"Then you must hunt up another plan."

"Yes."

"Have you no idea what it is?"

"Not the remotest."

"I fear you will make a botch of it."

"If I fail in one way I will try another, and failing in that I will make another effort."

"And failing a third time?"

"I will aid you to escape if I have to come here by night disguised as Clarice Carr and drive my Mexican dagger to the hilt in the heart of the sentinel at your cabin door, and then give you the uniform of an officer to pass out of the fort in, for it can be done, but only as a last resort."

"Remember, I shall save you, for I will not let my wrecked girlhood be stained publicly with dishonor."

"No! no! no! not that, not that!"

She drew her veil over her face, turned on her heel and left the cabin, the man feeling convinced now that he had two chances of escape.

"If Ruth's plot fails, that devil will surely save me, for she will not stand the fear of my reporting what I threatened to do," mused the outlaw.

The woman meanwhile had passed the sentinel, walking leisurely along, calm outwardly but with heart and brain in a whirl. She made her way back to her quarters by the most unfrequented paths and gained her room undetected by any one as playing the character of Clarice Carr.

Once in her room she threw off the dress and hat she had worn, and was soon in bed, determined to feign illness, for she wanted to be alone to think.

And there was very little feigning necessary, for she was really ill from the shock she had received.

At last she became more calm and was able to center her thoughts upon her plan to rescue the outlaw chief.

Mrs. De Sutro came up to see her and was distressed to find her ill.

"It's a sick headache."

"Let me have a cup of strong tea and then no one must disturb me until morning," she said.

Mrs. De Sutro came again at midnight before retiring, and found her patient sleeping peacefully, for Nina De Sutro had hit upon a plan of rescue, and then having conned it all over had dropped into a refreshing slumber.

## CHAPTER L.

### THE SURGEON'S MISSION.

WHEN Detective Raymond had departed from headquarters with his two friends, the colonel turned to Surgeon Powell and Buffalo Bill, who had seen that from some cause the colonel was greatly moved.

"Sit down, Powell, you and Cody, for I wish to talk to you," said the colonel, and he added:

"I am very glad that you are here."

They both obeyed, and the colonel lighted another cigar, and after smoking it for a couple of minutes, tossed it away.

"Tobacco always soothes me," he said, by way of explanation.

Then brightening up he continued:

"Let me ask pardon for my delay, but the truth is I was both nonplused and pleased by



the news brought by that gentleman, Raymond.

"He is a State detective, an officer of the law, and brought me this letter from General S—, which I will read to you."

This the colonel did, the two listening most attentively:

"This," he continued, "is a requisition from the Governor of Illinois for the prisoner, Silk Lasso Sam."

This also was read, the surgeon and the scout making no comment.

The colonel then continued:

"There seems to be in this a reflection upon my course in having at once tried this man by military court, which sentenced him to death upon the gallows."

"Out here on this border my word is law, and the outlaw has had a price set upon his head for breaking the laws of the land, for committing crimes untold, and he richly deserves his fate."

"The proof against him was perfect, and I sentenced him to death by hanging, at a certain date."

"Now, it must be that General S— gave out my report to the papers, the man was recognized as an old offender, who had broken the laws of the State of Illinois, and the State has sought to gain possession of him, to try him by civil process."

"Now he may, or may not be hanged, according to the law known by his lawyer, or his brilliancy as an orator, for most cases hang on these two things."

"Of course he will be back here soon after, again working the trails as a road-agent."

"If sent to prison he will be pardoned out by the next governor who may be of his political creed, who hopes to gain a few votes thereby for his clemency, and if hanged, then he saves us the trouble of swinging him up."

"Now, this is the point that pleases me, for, from certain reasons I cannot explain, I am very glad that I will not be the one to have to sign his death-warrant or send him to the gallows."

"That is an honor I shall gladly yield to the Governor of Illinois."

"But, Surgeon Powell, you spoke last week of desiring to run to Chicago upon important business of your own, and I desire to say that I will make you the bearer of my dispatch to General S— giving all the papers in the matter, which can be used against this man upon his trial there, and which will go far toward hanging him, a result most devoutly to be desired."

"I thank you, Colonel Dunwoody, and I appreciate the honor."

"You are to see the State's attorney and place him in possession of all the facts of the case against this outlaw, and yet this is to remain a secret, as I do not wish to be thought to influence the case, though of course the just deserts of the man is hanging."

"You can therefore get ready to return with Detective Raymond and his prisoner, and be especially careful that he does not escape them, for he is no ordinary man and they may not be accustomed to the ways of this wild land."

"I will endeavor to obey your orders in all things, Colonel Dunwoody."

"I know that well, Doctor Powell."

"But say nothing of your going, only be ready to start on the coach with the prisoner and his guards."

"I will, sir."

After a few other words of instruction from Colonel Dunwoody, Surgeon Powell left headquarters accompanied by Buffalo Bill.

The scout accompanied the doctor to his quarters, and there seemed to be something upon his mind.

At last he said:

"Frank, did you see those papers?"

"What papers?"

"The letter from the general and the requisition of the governor?"

"Yes, I saw them."

"I thought I noticed you reading them once."

"I did."

"But why?"

"Were they regular?"

"Perfectly."

"Seal, letter heading and all?"

"Everything was regular, Bill."

"Why do you ask?"

"I do not know, unless being a scout detective makes me suspicious of everything nowadays."

"Yes, and I feel the same way in many things."

"Well, you are going along, so if there is anything wrong I will be glad to know that you will be on hand to thwart it."

"What do you really suspect, Bill?"

"I don't know, but I am as suspicious as a coyote."

"Well, as you say, I will be along and will keep my eyes open, and I will go prepared for work."

"I am glad that you gave me a hint, for I was not at all suspicious in that quarter, I admit, and now I will be upon my guard," and as the scout turned away to go to his quarters Frank Powell looked after him a moment and muttered:

"Yes, Bill, you have set me to thinking."

## CHAPTER LI.

### AMBUSHING THE COLONEL.

THE coming of the three detectives, with an intimation from General S— that a mistake had been made, and with a requisition for the prisoner from the Governor of Illinois spread quickly around the fort.

It ran like wildfire through the officers' quarters, the barracks and the settlement.

Rumors of all kinds were flying about, that Colonel Dunwoody had overstepped his authority in trying the outlaw chief and his men by military court, and that he would meet with a strong reprimand if not something more severe.

The prisoner, rumor had it, was a convict, escaped from the State's Prison of Illinois and if he had been executed much valuable information which he possessed would have been forever lost.

It was said that he was to be saved by turning State's evidence, and the Governor of Illinois had raised such a rumpus about the trial of the prisoner by the military, no matter what his crimes on the border might have been, that the Secretary of War had hastily taken action in the matter, and demanded that the outlaw be given up.

These and innumerable other rumors were flying about, and it was not long before the prisoner heard the news.

Colonel Dunwoody, knowing the facts of case, was all serene as to the result, and was more than glad to give the prisoner up.

"I could never win that lovely girl by offering her the hand in marriage which had signed the death sentence of her brother for whom her love is almost idolatrous," he said to himself.

Then, as he had heard the various rumors afloat, he mused with a smile:

"How little it takes to start a lie upon its rounds."

"A letter from General S— and this requisition from the Governor of Illinois, was all there was to cause a hundred idle tales to be set afloat."

"Well, I shall be glad when the prisoner is off my hands, and I trust he will be hanged— Well, orderly?"

"The prisoner, sir, Silk Lasso Sam, requests an interview with you, colonel."

"Indeed?"

"I suppose he has already been posted as to what is going on."

"It is as hard to keep a state secret as it is to find out a woman's exact age."

"Say that I will come to his cabin, orderly."

The orderly disappeared and soon after Colonel Dunwoody started for the prison of the outlaw.

He passed Nina De Sutro on the way and said:

"You look pale, Miss Nina, and I was sorry to hear of your indisposition."

"It was of little consequence, colonel; but may I ask you if it is true that this outlaw is to be surrendered to the State of Illinois?"

"It is true, Miss Nina."

"When does he go?"

"On the next coach day."

"Then he will escape death?"

"Here, at least, though, perhaps, he may be hanged by civil process of law."

"I thank you, sir," and Nina passed on, while there flashed through her mind great

joy at being relieved of having to carry out the bold plan she had formed for the rescue of the man.

"I think they will hang him in Illinois, and he will hardly expect me to rescue him from the civil authorities."

"But I shall never feel at rest until his neck is stretched."

"I hope that he will attempt to escape on the way, and be shot by the guards."

The colonel, meanwhile, met, as he strolled along the bluffs, Clarice Carr.

He stopped for a moment's talk with her, and waited, supposing she would ask him, also, about the prisoner.

But she did not.

"Where is your curiosity, Miss Clarice?" he asked, with a smile.

"I have no idle curiosity, colonel."

"This is remarkable, for when I went to the adjutant's this morning I met seven ladies, all of whom asked me about this prisoner, Silk Lasso Sam."

"On my way back a dozen were lying in ambush for me, and I had to tell the story over again."

"Just now I was waylaid by Miss De Sutro, and she questioned me like a Philadelphia lawyer, and now you have no questions to ask."

"I have not, sir, for I am not in command of Pioneer Post."

"Well, I do not know whether you are or not, for you command about two-thirds of the officers," was the gallant reply.

"Yet I am under orders myself, colonel."

"And obey, I have noticed; but let me tell you that I am more than glad to have this man Arden taken out of my keeping, for I did not relish having to order him hanged."

"I am glad too, sir, on his sister's account; but I trust that he will not be allowed to go free through some trick of the law, for though I do not believe in capital punishment, still such a man should be imprisoned for life, I think."

"And I agree with you, though, if hanging is justifiable he richly deserves such a fate."

"I am now going to see him, and I will drop in and see you on my way back," and the colonel passed on his way.

## CHAPTER LII.

### THE INTERVIEW.

THE prisoner arose as Colonel Dunwoody entered the cabin and bowed courteously.

"Pardon me, sir, but you see that I cannot be hospitable even in my own house," he said with a sad smile.

"Resume your seat, Arden, and tell me why you desired this interview?"

"I have heard, sir, that a requisition has been sent to you for my body, by the Governor of Illinois."

"May I ask if it is true, Colonel Dunwoody?"

"It is, sir."

"There is, then, a conflict of authority it would seem, between the military and the civil authorities regarding me?"

"Well, no, only there were crimes alleged to have been committed by you in the State of Illinois, which the governor wishes to try you for."

"My authority is here, for your crimes committed upon the border, but this requisition takes precedence in that you are said to be an escaped convict and your crimes were committed against the State of Illinois prior to your lawless deeds on this frontier."

"That is all there is in it, Mr. Arden."

"I thank you, sir; but is there no possibility that I can be kept here for my execution and not be sent back to Illinois?"

"I can see none."

"You could not assume the responsibility of detaining me?"

"I could not, and to be frank with you, Mr. Arden, I am more than glad that my hands will be clear of your execution."

"Yet you offered a reward for my body, dead or alive?"

"Very true in the discharge of my duty, and were you my own brother I would have you hanged upon the day set."

"You are now to go out of my charge and I am glad of it."

"You do not appear to be revengeful, Colonel Dunwoody?"



"I am not, I hope, for it is a feeling one should be above allowing a place in his heart, from my standpoint."

"May I ask your particular reason for being glad to send me to Illinois?"

"I wish for the misery and misfortune of no man."

"You richly deserve your fate, and, as the laws of our land punish by hanging the crimes of which you have been proven guilty, I sincerely hope that you will not escape punishment, and yet it would be better to give you a life sentence to my mind, as something far more severe to bear than hanging."

"And you will not strain a point and keep me here, sir?"

"No, and why do you dread to go to Illinois?"

"I shall be taken there to be hanged, sir."

"And remaining here you will be much more quickly hanged."

"Still, I would prefer to remain here, sir, than to trust myself to the mercy of an Illinois court."

"They can do no more against you than I have done, Mr. Arden—condemn you to death."

"There is another thing I wish to speak to you about, Colonel Dunwoody?"

"Well, sir?"

"My sister."

"Ah!"

"I wish to talk to you, sir, of Ruth."

"I am wholly at your service, Mr. Arden, and am glad that you spoke of your sister."

"You were kind to her when she was here, sir, and she appreciated it, as I also do."

"But I wish to disarm in your mind, Colonel Dunwoody, any thought that Ruth is in any way connected with my evil life."

"My dear sir, I would no more connect that pure, angelic girl with such a devil as you have proven yourself to be than I would compare darkness and sunlight," said the colonel, suddenly losing his urbane manner and becoming vehement.

The prisoner smiled and said:

"I agree with you perfectly, sir: Ruth and I are as different as light and darkness."

"But I wished to say that I was well born, my name being a proud and honored one until I disgraced it, and my parents dying left their fortune to my sister, for I was disinherited by my father, and very justly so."

"Ruth devoted her life to my reformation and failed, and the noble girl will mourn deeply the fate which I must some day suffer."

"She is her own mistress, possesses a large fortune, and yet I would feel that she has one who would kindly look after her when I am gone, and I am going to ask you to let me give you the address of our old home, where a letter sent will reach her, and beg that you will at least keep the cold and cruel world from making her suffer too deeply upon my account, if it is within your power to do so."

"Mr. Arden, I will tell you that it will be my greatest pleasure to do as you request, for when she was here I took a deep interest in your sister, and formed a friendship for her which will be lasting and sincere."

"I regret keenly your misfortunes, sir, and wish that I could help you, but it is not in my power to do so."

"The detectives sent by the governor are here for you, and they will take you with them the day after to-morrow."

"Good-by, Mr. Arden, and may Heaven have mercy upon you."

With this the colonel turned away and the prisoner was alone once more.

### CHAPTER LIII.

#### ACCUSED.

COLONEL DUNWOODY was true to his word and returned to his quarters by the house of Major Lester.

Clarice opened the door for him and he said pleasantly:

"Thanks, for I am in full retreat, and this is a haven of refuge for me."

"Glance up and down the rows and you'll discover several ambushing parties lying in

wait for me, and I have barely escaped the petticoats upon my trail by dodging in here."

"I am very much in demand to-day by the ladies, Miss Clarice."

Clarice laughed at beholding, as the colonel had said, the petticoat ambushers in squads ready to head him off and learn the facts regarding the prisoner.

As none of the officers had yet been made acquainted with just how matters stood, of course the ladies could not learn from their husbands what was really the status of affairs.

The colonel having thrown himself into an easy-chair said:

"Well, Miss Clarice, I had a long talk with that very wonderful man, Silk Lasso Sam."

"Yes, sir, and I suppose found him unrepentant, as he was upon the single visit I made to him?"

"He was unrepentant, yes; but did I understand you to say that you had been but once to see him, Miss Clarice?"

"That is all, sir."

"And that is strange."

"What is, may I ask, sir?"

"That you visited him only once."

"That is all, sir."

"Put your thinking cap on, Miss Clarice, and see if you do not recall going there more than once."

"I need not think, sir, for there can be no doubt, as such a circumstance as another visit I could not forget, as I shall never cease to remember the one call I made upon him through a sense of duty."

"My dear Miss Clarice, I cannot but take your word for it, but you know all appertaining to the prisoner is reported to me."

"Doubtless, sir."

"And you are reported as having been to the cabin to visit Silk Lasso Sam on two separate days and occasions."

"The report is wrong, sir."

"It furthermore gives the time of your visits and the length of time you remained."

"May I ask how long you remained the first visit?"

"The *only* visit, you mean, sir."

"Yes."

"I remained just seventeen minutes."

"And there was no second visit?"

"None, sir."

"Then I shall at once see the officer that made this false report, which is to the effect that you passed the sentinel and remained in the prisoner's cabin just one hour and ten minutes."

An indignant flash came into the eyes of the young girl at this charge, and she said with some show of anger:

"Colonel Dunwoody, you know me well enough to understand that I have nothing to hide, that there is no treachery or deceit in my composition, and I will esteem it a favor if you will bring the officer and sentinel who made this report to confront me."

"I shall go at once, Miss Clarice, to sift this matter," and the colonel hastened away.

He went direct to his quarters and sent for the officer who had made the report, and the sentinel who was on duty at the time of the alleged visit of the maiden to the prison.

He also ordered the sergeant and corporal of the guard, who were on duty on that day, to report to him immediately.

The result was that the officers and soldiers very soon appeared at headquarters, and the colonel asked:

"Captain Franklin, who was on duty at the prisoner Silk Lasso Sam's cabin when it is said Miss Carr visited him three days ago?"

"McCarey, sir, was the sentinel."

"Did you see the lady yourself, sir?"

"I did, sir, for she passed me and bowed."

"It was Miss Carr?"

"Yes, sir."

"You will vouch for this?"

"Well, Colonel Dunwoody, I will not do that, for the lady was veiled."

"Ah, and yet you supposed it was Miss Carr?"

"I am very sure of it, sir, for she was dressed as Miss Carr dresses, and wore that very pretty red sombrero, with its embroidery, which she wears."

"Thank you, Captain Franklin."

"Now hear what the others have to say."

The sergeant was next called, and reported that Miss Carr had passed him, and he had

bowed to her, when she was upon her way to the prison.

The corporal had also spoken to her, and Sentinel McCarey stated that the lady had passed him, saying simply:

"I am Miss Carr, and I suppose you have your orders regarding me."

"She was in the prison how long, McCarey?"

"Just one hour and ten minutes, sir."

The officer and soldiers were then dismissed, with orders not to speak of why they had been called to headquarters, and the colonel at once sent a note to Clarice, asking if she would come over to headquarters, and ask Major and Mrs. Lester to accompany her.

### CHAPTER LIV.

#### UNVAILED.

In a short while after the note was sent, the major arrived with the two ladies.

Clarice saw at a glance that the colonel was greatly worried about something.

"Miss Clarice, I have received the report of Captain Franklin, the sergeant and corporal of the guard, and the sentinel on duty at the time of this alleged visit of yours to the prisoner, Silk Lasso Sam."

"Yes, Colonel Dunwoody, and what do they say?"

"The captain states that he met you, and the others report the same."

"This is a very remarkable statement, Colonel Dunwoody."

"I asked Captain Franklin if he would vouch for its being you, and he said that you were veiled, and also the others made the same statement, the sentinels saying that the lady in question reported herself to be Miss Carr."

"This was at what time, Colonel Dunwoody?" asked the major considerably amazed.

The colonel looked at the paper in his hand and gave the time.

"Why, Clarice was absent with us in the carriage at that very time, colonel, in fact the whole of that day," the major said.

"Major, I have not for once doubted Miss Clarice in her statement to me, and I only wish to find out who it is that has visited the prisoner, impersonating Miss Clarice to do so."

"I cannot understand it," the major replied.

"The lady wore Miss Carr's red, silver-embroidered sombrero, her dress and her veil."

Clarice gave a start at this and put her fingers upon her lips to silence Mrs. Lester.

But in vain, for out it came:

"Why, colonel, that could have been no one else than Nina De Sutro, for she borrowed that red sombrero as a pattern for some embroidery for one for herself, and on that day, while Mrs. De Sutro has a dress the counterpart of the one Clarice often wears."

"Miss Clarice, you and Miss De Sutro are about the same size, I believe?" said the colonel.

"I have nothing whatever to say, Colonel Dunwoody, for I have told you that I made no second visit to the prisoner Silk Lasso Sam."

"I hope you will pardon me, Miss Clarice, for the annoyance I have been compelled to give you."

"There is no need to ask my pardon, colonel, for you have not offended and have done no wrong."

"I can well understand your position, sir, and I have no feeling whatever in the matter, other than to regret that I have been imposed upon."

"As I regret it, Miss Clarice, and I assure your that Captain Franklin, the sergeant, corporal and sentinel shall at once be made acquainted with the fact that the visitor to Silk Lasso Sam was not yourself."

After a short visit the major and the ladies left the headquarters and putting on his hat Colonel Dunwoody directed his steps to the home of Lieutenant-Colonel De Sutro.

He asked to see Miss De Sutro, and Nina soon entered the room, looking very pretty in a morning-dress.

"This is an honor I appreciate, Colonel Dunwoody, a morning call from you?" she said in her sweet way.



"Perhaps, Miss De Sutro, you will appreciate it less when I ask you why you have been visiting the prisoner, Silk Lasso Sam, without permission, and masquerading to the detriment of another lady to do so?"

The colonel's voice was strangely stern, and Nina De Sutro had never seen so severe an expression upon his face.

She paled and flushed by turns and it was full a quarter of a minute before she replied.

Then she put on a look of injured innocence and said in a tearful voice:

"Oh Colonel Dunwoody, you are angry with me, and when I meant to do no harm."

"I only wished to see that poor desperate man again and bid him farewell, and see if I could not do him only a little act of kindness."

"I had just been given by Mrs. De Sutro the dress so like Miss Carr's, and which was too small for her, and I put on the red sombrero Clarice wears and wore them without thinking of the harm they might do."

"And yet you spoke of yourself as Miss Carr?"

"Those who saw me called me Miss Carr, and being veiled I carried out the joke."

"I am so very sorry and I will go at once to Miss Carr and beg her pardon, while I will do all in my power to make amends for my wrong-doing."

"Then see Captain Franklin also, Miss De Sutro, and explain the affair to him, as also to the sergeant, corporal and sentinel."

"How can I do this, sir?"

"I cannot advise you, Miss De Sutro, and I believe you are clever enough to extricate yourself from this position without further advice from me, and also to save Miss Carr from being misunderstood."

"I will do as you wish, sir."

"But you are angry with me, Colonel Dunwoody?"

"No, I am sorry that you placed yourself and Miss Carr in a false position," was the reply, and when the colonel left the room Nina De Sutro threw herself upon the floor and burst into tears.

#### CHAPTER LV.

##### THE SCOUT'S REQUEST.

HORSESHOE NED, always an important personage in the eyes of many, was particularly so on the morning of his departure for the East with no less a person as a passenger than Silk Lasso Sam.

He had told over and over again the story of his last run out, and had brought with him as evidence of Miss Arden's deadly shooting the outlaw wounded in both arms, and who had been placed under guard in the hospital.

Now he was to go out with Silk Lasso Sam and the three detectives.

He had another passenger, just whom he had no knowledge of, but the box seat had been engaged for some one who was to go along.

The coach rattled up to its starting place, the mail was put aboard and instructions given, and the three detectives stood ready to receive their prisoner.

Presently a squad of soldiers was seen approaching and in their midst was the tall form of the outlaw chief.

He walked upright with soldierly step, and looked about him as he halted at the stage station with calm indifference.

A very large crowd had gathered to see him off, and as the guard halted they were anxious to get a look at his face."

The officer in charge after coming to a halt asked:

"Is Mr. Raymond, the detective here?"

Henry Raymond stepped forward and said:

"I am Detective Henry Raymond, sir."

"I have orders to surrender into your keeping this prisoner, known as Silk Lasso Sam."

"I am ready to receive him, sir."

"Then please sign this receipt."

The officer drew from his belt a paper which the detective carefully read, and stepping into the stage office signed.

"Thank you, sir."

"The prisoner is now in your charge," and ordering the sergeant to march the guard back to the guard-house, the officer turned

upon his heel and walked leisurely away, as though there was no more interest in the case for him.

The detective ordered the prisoner to enter the coach, assisting him as both his hands and feet were manacled, the others followed, and Henry Raymond called out:

"All ready, driver."

"I'm all ready, too, but I have orders to wait a few minutes."

But a moment after Surgeon Powell hastily approached and leaping to the box seat said:

"Let her go, Ned."

"The seat was for you, then, sir?"

"Yes."

"Then she goes."

The whip cracked and the team went rapidly away down the hill toward the stockade gate.

Soon after the stage rolled out of sight in the distance, and Horseshoe Ned, having given the idea to the uninitiated in stage travel that he kept up that speed all the way, now drew the horses down to a slow pace for the long drive ahead.

Hardly had the coach disappeared when Buffalo Bill walked up to headquarters.

The colonel, with a relieved look upon his face, was seated upon the piazza talking with Captain Caruth.

"Ah, Cody, any news?" asked the colonel.

"Not any, sir; but I came to ask leave to go on a trail for a few days?"

"Any definite point in view, Cody?"

"Well, no, colonel, only I thought I would like to follow Horseshoe Ned's coach."

"You have some motive for asking this, Cody?"

"Yes, sir."

"Out with it."

"The coach carried a very valuable freight, sir, in the person of Silk Lasso Sam."

"Yes, and you think that he may escape?"

"Well, sir, it has been rumored about that he was to go by this coach, and it may be that an attempt at rescue might be made."

"Impossible."

"Why impossible, sir?"

"He is well guarded by three determined men, while Surgeon Powell and Horseshoe Ned are along, and I do not believe a force could be raised at short notice that would dare attack those five."

"Still, sir, Silk Lasso Sam has many friends, and those who sought to curry favor with him might attempt a rescue."

"There is something in this."

"There is much in it, I should say, colonel, and if you wish I will take some troopers and escort the coach past the danger line," Captain Caruth said.

"It would be a hard ride for the troop to overtake the coach now, Captain Caruth, and Cody is ready, I see, for the trail, so he can go."

"I will start at once, sir," was the scout's reply, and he saluted and walked rapidly back to his quarters.

Anticipating that the colonel would grant his request for him to follow the coach, Buffalo Bill had already prepared for his going, and had his horse awaiting him, the very best animal that he had, and he was never known to have an inferior one.

Ten minutes after his request was granted the scout was riding out of the stockade, and once out of sight of the fort, went on at a very rapid pace, for the coach had all of ten miles the start of him.

#### CHAPTER LVI.

##### ON THE TRAIL OF THE COACH.

BUFFALO BILL's long life upon the border had made him watchful, cautious, nervy and cunning.

He had all the attributes to make a great borderman, and he could bring into play his every talent and energy when it was needed.

He had a suspicion that constantly grew upon him that there might be a rescue of the prisoner attempted.

Did not Bonnie Belle know something, he wondered, of this intended requisition from the governor and thus prepare for the rescue when the opportunity offered?

Might she not meet the detectives on the

way with their prisoner, and with unlimited money at her command gain by strategy and bribery what could not be done by force?

So argued the scout and that was why he wished to go on the trail of the coach.

He rode lively until out of sight of the fort.

Then he dismounted, gave his horse a drink of water at a stream, tightened his saddle-girths and looking at his watch said:

"Just two hours since Ned left."

"That means, as he drives, all of twelve miles from this point."

"I should overtake him about Deep Dell Brook or a little beyond, only I do not wish to get close enough to be seen by them."

Mounting then he put his horse into a swinging canter and held him to it for miles, when he reached the country where the hills grew steep and long.

Two hours after leaving the fort he halted for a short rest and said:

"The coach is about six miles ahead now, I take it, if Ned is on schedule time."

Again he resumed his way and for another long time held on when he descended into Deep Dell Brook.

Just as he halted his horse for water, confident that the coach could not be very far from him then, his eyes fell upon the trail beyond.

There was something in it which caught his eye.

It was a revolver.

He spurred toward it, dismounted and cried:

"It's Frank Powell's revolver!"

He looked about him and saw tracks of horses, blood-stains, foot-prints and the evidence of a struggle.

Instantly he leaped into his saddle and his horse was sent flying on up the hill.

A mile ahead he caught sight of the coach, and it was driving rapidly.

He had no time to lose in overtaking it, so drawing his revolver he fired several shots.

The sound reached the ears of Horseshoe Ned who glanced back, saw who it was and wheeling his team in a broad space of the trail drove back to meet the scout with all speed.

He soon drew rein and the scout dashed up and leaped from his horse.

"Ho, Ned, what is the matter?" called out Buffalo Bill.

"Matter enough, Bill, for the Doc, the detectives and the prisoner is gone."

"Gone where?"

"Don't know."

"Why don't you know?" angrily said the scout.

In answer Horseshoe Ned turned the back of his head and said!

"See there Bill."

"It's a wound."

"It's something."

"My poor Ned, what has happened?"

"Durned ef I know, for I'm kinder dazed like."

"Tell me what you can."

"I will."

"You were held up."

"I don't know," and the driver passed his hand across his head and said:

"It pains me, Bill."

"Come, Ned, get down from your box, for there is a brook and let me dress that wound, for I have a needle and thread and can stitch it up for you, for it is an ugly-looking gash."

"Then tell me all you can remember."

The driver obeyed without a word, allowed the scout to take the stitches in the wound without flinching and fixed his handkerchief over it, wet with arnica which Buffalo Bill always carried with him.

"It feels better now, Bill, thankee."

"Oh, you'll come round all right soon," and the scout said no more, for he did not wish to hurry the driver and perhaps fret him in the condition in which he then was.

After a few moments of silence Ned said:

"I think it was a rock, Bill."

"What was?"

"That struck me."

"Ah, and it was at Deep Dell Brook?"

"Yes, the horses were drinkin' thar, and Doc and me was talkin', when suddenly came a blow that knocked me clear off the box, for I was down on the ground just out of the stream when I came round."

"The team was standing near me, just



waitin' like humans for me ter come round, and when I tried to git up I found I was uncommon dizzy.

"But I did git up at last and then I see thet ther mail bags was gone and I scrambled up to my box as best I could and come on.

"I don't know no more about it than you does, Bill, save that thar is one of them detectives dead inside the coach, and he 'pears to hev been robbed too, for I remember thet he hed a watch and chain."

Buffalo Bill sprung quickly to the coach door, threw it open and there he beheld a dead man.

It was Henry Raymond.

## CHAPTER LVII.

### BUFFALO BILL'S MAD RIDE.

As Buffalo Bill gazed at the dead detective he saw that there was a bullet wound in his heart.

There was evidence that he had also been robbed, though in searching through the pockets of the man he found a bundle of papers which he at once took possession of.

He mounted to the top of the coach and saw there red stains and indications of a struggle.

The grip-sack of Surgeon Powell and the baggage of the prisoner and the detective were also missing.

At last Buffalo Bill said, as though at a loss to know what to do:

"Ned?"

"Yes, Bill."

"You are able to drive on to the station?"

"I am."

"Then continue on your way, and report your having been held up on the road, and all that you can remember that occurred."

"I will."

"I must return to the fort at all speed, and I am going to take one of your horses, to enable me to give mine a rest, for I shall stake him out in the Deep Dell Brook Valley, for the trail is to be taken up from there.

"You can rig one horse in the lead, can you not?"

"Easy, to oblige you, Bill, for I sees that you is hot for scalps."

"I am, so give me your best horse."

"I'll do it."

"If I kill him I'll replace him, but I can make good time to the fort, make my report, have my scouts and a troop follow, and ride a fresh horse back to Deep Dell Brook.

"There I will find my horse well rested, and leaving the other animal for the scouts to pick up, I can get along on the trail of the outlaws who did this deed a long way before night, marking my way for those coming after me to follow rapidly.

"You've got ter do some tall riding, Buffalo Bill."

"All right, I'll do it, for remember, my best pard, Frank Powell, is either dead or a prisoner."

"That's so."

"Take the roan mare, Bill."

"She's an all-day animal, fast and willing."

Buffalo Bill hastily threw the harness off of the roan mare, put his saddle and bridle on her, and bidding Horseshoe Ned good-by, led his own horse down to a secluded spot upon Deep Dell Brook.

There he staked him out, and leaping into the saddle, sent the roan mare off like an arrow.

He had just twenty-five miles to go to reach the fort, and in two hours and a half he dashed through the stockade gate, and up to the colonel's quarters, the gallant roan staggering under him, and with a groan dropping dead as the scout sprung from his saddle.

The colonel heard of his rapid coming, and met him on the piazza, where there were a number of officers and ladies, among the latter Clarice Carr and Nina De Suro.

"Colonel Dunwoody, I have to report overtaking the coach a mile beyond Deep Dell Brook, sir, and found Horseshoe Ned half-dazed from a wound in his head, made I believe, by a rock, and inside the stage the dead body of Detective Raymond, shot through the heart.

"He had been robbed, as also the coach of the mail and the luggage it carried, while Surgeon Powell, the prisoner and the other two detectives were missing.

"There was an evidence of a severe struggle, sir, and so I took one of Ned's horses and rode back, leaving mine to rest, while, as I came through the gate I ordered another horse which I will return on at once so as to take the trail before night.

"With your permission, sir, I would like to take a dozen of my men, and ask for Captain Caruth with a score of his troopers to follow me, for I will mark my trail well, sir."

"Cody, you are worth a hundred men at any time, and I can now understand your riding your horse to death.

"There comes Texas Jack with another animal for you, so give him your orders and do you start back at once, while your scouts can follow, and Captain Caruth will take his entire troop, for there must be no mistake about catching those fellows who have been guilty of this outrage."

With a salute to the colonel Buffalo Bill turned to his fresh horse, Texas Jack having taken the saddle and bridle from the dead animal and placed them upon the one he had led up for his chief.

"Jack, get twelve of the men and provisions in plenty and follow me at once to Deep Dell Brook, where Captain Caruth and his troop are coming also."

"We will be there, Bill," was the answer of Texas Jack.

Dropping into the saddle, with a wave of his hand, Buffalo Bill dashed away like the wind.

"Deep Dell Brook in two hours at that pace, and another dead horse," said Texas Jack as he saw his chief dash away like the wind, settling himself in his saddle as he started down the hill, as though it really was his intention to reach the scene of the tragedy in two hours or kill the horse he rode.

## CHAPTER LVIII.

### TAKING UP THE TRAIL.

THE scouts were ready fifteen minutes after the departure of Buffalo Bill, and within half an hour the troop of Captain Caruth rode out of quarters on their path.

The scouts, twelve dashing fellows under Texas Jack, had settled down to a quick trot, and were just disappearing from sight in the distance when Captain Caruth started off with his men at a pace very little less rapid.

It was an hour before sunset when the scouts reached the Deep Dell Brook.

They threw themselves from their horses to give them a rest, and they set about looking for "signs."

The first thing they discovered was the horse ridden by Buffalo Bill.

The animal was standing dead-beat in the edge of the stream, panting like a hound and his appearance indicating that Buffalo Bill had gotten there with ample time to be far on the trail of the outlaws by that time.

Then they discovered the signs of the struggle where the coach had been halted, and down the stream led the trail.

Not far below was a stick in the top of which was a slip of paper.

Taking it Texas Jack read in his chief's well-known hand:

"There were mounted outlaws awaiting the coach at Deep Dell Brook.

"Their horses were staked out at the bend below here, and they had camped there all night.

"The tracks show nine horses were there, and I suppose that means as many men.

"With their prisoners, Surgeon Powell and the detectives, they can hardly travel very fast.

"I shall press rapidly on until dark, marking trail as I go so that you can follow with considerable speed.

BILL."

A scout was sent back by Texas Jack to the ford with this note, to give to Captain Caruth, and then the scout pressed on once more at a quick trot.

All along they saw where Buffalo Bill had marked the trail, and when at last night came on they were compelled to halt, but they were glad to know that Buffalo Bill had had all of two hours more of daylight than they had.

A scout was sent back to bring the troopers up to the scouts' camp, and soon after they arrived.

"Well, Texas Jack, what do you think of the situation?" asked Captain Caruth, as he sat in his camp that night, having sent for the scout.

"Buffalo Bill had three hours of daylight at least, sir, when he reached the Brook, as his horse showed that he came through at full speed.

"Then, sir, he had his own fresh horse to mount there, and the trail of the robbers he doubtless followed at a run to get as far as possible before nightfall.

"The robbers could not have gone half so fast, and were certainly not expecting pursuit to-day, which would cause them to go slow, for they had killed Ned, I suppose they thought, and were not expecting Cody to be upon their trail."

"Then the chances are, you think, that Buffalo Bill is not very far behind the band?" asked Captain Caruth.

"I do, sir, and we can start just when it is light enough to see, so that we can keep as close upon Cody's heels as possible."

"Now, what is your opinion as to where these outlaws came from?"

"I pass there, captain, for I supposed that all of the band of the outlaw chief, Silk Lasso Sam, were either dead or wiped out.

"But, it seems I am wrong, sir."

"Yes, for these were certainly men who were willing to come to the rescue of their chief."

"Yes, sir, and I only hope that no other harm than being taken prisoner has befallen Surgeon Powell."

"So do I."

"Yet, Jack, I have such an abiding faith in Surgeon Powell's capacity for taking care of himself that I do not believe that he was born to die with his boots on."

"I hope he can take his time about it, sir, when his time comes, for no better man did I ever meet, nor do I care to know," was the scout's comment.

"If he has an enemy, Jack, it is an outlaw, an Indian or a villain."

"You are right, sir."

"But, we had better get all the sleep we can, for we will be kept humping it to-morrow, if Buffalo Bill can find horses to ride."

"Yes, he's a rough and ready rider, and it would take a score of horses to break him down."

"Now, good-night," and wrapping his blanket about him the captain dropped off to sleep at once.

Texas Jack had said that all the men could rest, for he would keep watch, and he started off alone, leaving the whole camp in deep slumber.

He, too, had an iron frame, and lantern in hand he picked out the trail for a distance of some six or seven miles.

Then he returned to camp, on foot as he had gone, and, as it was yet an hour before dawn, aroused the men so that they could reach the place he had gone to before day light, get breakfast, and be ready for the trail when able to see it.

## CHAPTER LIX.

### THE COLONEL RECEIVES A LETTER.

TOWARD sunset of the day the troop and scouts started to follow Buffalo Bill upon the outlaws' trail, a horseman was seen coming rapidly toward the fort.

He was coming along the trail from the post nearest above, where there was a more direct and frequent communication than from Pioneer Post, with the East.

It was soon seen that he was a military courier and his coming was watched with great interest.

The news brought by Buffalo Bill had fallen like a thunderbolt upon those in the fort.

The colonel was more impressed by it than he cared to reveal.

He naturally supposed that the outlaw chief had escaped, and what the fate of Surgeon Powell was no one could tell.

There was no more popular man in the service than was the Surgeon Scout.

Officers, soldiers, ladies and children all admired and liked him.

If Horseshoe Ned had been wounded and left for dead, all who knew Frank Powell were sure that he had not been captured without a desperate struggle.



That his body had not been found was hopeful that he had not been killed.

Yet he might have been killed and thrown into Deep Dell Brook.

The fate of the other two detectives was uncertain.

What it all meant could only be surmised.

The colonel could not find it in his heart to connect Ruth Arden, as he knew her, with this tragic escape of her brother.

It did not seem like the woman he had met to plan an escape where death must ensue, the innocent fall to save the wicked outlaw chief.

In the fort there was a diversity of opinion and all were very freely expressed.

Clarice Carr did not know what to believe, while Nina De Sutro, after thinking the matter over, said to herself:

"That is the work of that girl and no one else."

"She was determined that her brother should not hang, and she plotted to have him rescued at all costs."

"In some way she learned of his intended removal from the fort, and so she planned accordingly, and plotted well."

"If so, she has put herself in a very unfortunate position, for she can be looked upon as an accessory."

"Oh, that in the *melee* Arden had been killed!"

"How rejoiced would I be, for then his tongue would be forever silenced."

"What a fool I was to allow him to bluff me as he did."

"He certainly frightened me terribly by his stating that I could show no marriage certificate."

"Neither can I, but I know the priest that married us; I know the church well, and I saw it put upon the Register."

"He thought that I had forgotten, and so forced me to vow to rescue him."

"Well, he has escaped, and I only hope that he will soon be shot, for then will I be free, and a widow."

"It is useless for me ever to dream of love with Colonel Dunwoody now, for I know that he suspects me."

"I cannot, I dare not tell him the truth, and doing what I did, impersonating Clarice Carr, I cannot make him understand unless I confess all to him."

"No, I must go on as best I can and try and wipe out that mistake of mine from his memory."

"I shall make an effort now to win Caruth, and failing there I will turn to Lieutenant Turpin, for he is by no means bad, and he has prospects of promotion as well as money."

"I would like to know what news that courier brings, for I will be anxious until Buffalo Bill again returns to the fort."

So mused the woman, and with her beauty, wit, cleverness and money, it was very certain, if she could bury Silk Lasso Sam, the world yet had charms for her which she would make the most of.

The courier, meanwhile, had reached headquarters, and dismounting, had delivered his leather satchel to Colonel Dunwoody.

He had come from the upper fort, also under the command of Colonel Dunwoody, and the officer in charge there had sent him through as a special, as an important paper had come there, addressed to Pioneer Post.

The colonel saw two letters, one an official document and so marked and sealed, the other a personal communication.

Both came from Chicago, the army headquarters.

The official letter was first opened and was only some special orders, and a sanction of the act of Colonel Dunwoody in having Silk Lasso Sam and his men so promptly tried and sentenced.

This was a satisfaction to him, and then he turned to his letter.

It was a personal one from General S — and read as follows:

"MY DEAR DUNWOODY:—

"If you resist falling in love with that beautiful girl to whom I gave a letter to you, then you are indeed destined never to be a Benedict."

"I am sorry you can do no more for her than to allow her to see that villain of a brother, who certainly deserves hanging, and I suppose will be promptly executed on the day set, as he should be. The young lady did ask me something about the possibility of her having the civil law take the man

from the military, but I have heard no more of it, so suppose she made no attempt to do so."

"You have shown nerve and determination in your dealing with those border ruffians, and I uphold you in it."

The letter then spoke of other matters, and having read it to the end Colonel Dunwoody hastily sent for Lieutenant-Colonel De Sutro and Major Lester.

## CHAPTER LX.

### A COUNCIL OF WAR.

WHEN Lieutenant-Colonel De Sutro and Major Lester arrived at headquarters they found the commandant pacing the floor with a look as though very much annoyed.

"Gentlemen, I received by courier this evening a dispatch from the military headquarters and a letter from General S— and they perplex me, so I wish you would kindly look over those papers, brought by Detective Raymond some days since, and see how you regard them?"

Colonel De Sutro at once took the letter from headquarters explaining the situation regarding the prisoner Silk Lasso Sam.

He read it through carefully and handed it to Major Lester who did the same.

"Do you see anything irregular in that, gentlemen?"

"I do not, sir."

"Nor do I."

"Read this now, please."

The requisition of the Governor of Illinois, for the delivery to his authorized agent, Detective Henry Raymond, was then read by both officers.

"Now give me your opinion of that, please, gentlemen."

"There is but one opinion to give, sir."

"So I say," added Major Lester.

"Now, gentlemen, a courier just brought this official paper, and I have received with it a personal letter from General S—."

"Please do me the kindness to read the official document, and I will read to you extracts from the general's letter."

This was done, and then the two junior officers sat gazing at their senior.

"What does it mean?" asked Colonel Dunwoody.

"I can see but one meaning to it," the major said.

"And that meaning, major?"

"Is that the general was in ignorance of the governor's requisition or—"

"But he could not be, when his other communication orders me to give up the prisoner."

"That is so, sir."

"And, as Texas Jack always says, I pass."

"So do I," the lieutenant-colonel said, with a smile.

"Now this last letter and dispatch from the general is dated ten days after the former one and the requisition, so I can see but one thing to be said of the first received, and that is that they are forgeries."

"But that cannot be, colonel, for see the real and official letter heads, and the writing," the major said.

"The letter heads have been stolen, as also the use of the seal, while the handwriting of the adjutant-general has been copied."

"I tell you, gentlemen, some very clever head and hand have been at work here for the rescue of that prisoner, and it was accomplished, too, for those men were no more detectives than you are."

The colonel paced to and fro, deeply moved, and the two officers with him evidently begun to see the situation as he did, for Colonel De Sutro remarked:

"It is true that it could be done, Colonel Dunwoody, and we read about such escapes in novels, but it can hardly be possible."

"It is possible and has been done, gentlemen, I now feel certain of that."

"But, keep the matter quiet, please, and I will at once send a special courier with a letter to General S— and these forged papers, stating just what has occurred."

"It would be best to do so, sir."

"Yes, Lester, all that I can do."

"I will also send another courier after Caruth with a letter giving these facts, so that he can advise Buffalo Bill and they will not be acting in the dark."

"It is a bold, clever game that has been played, and I fear it was too well planned for there to be any doubt as to the escape of that daring outlaw, Silk Lasso Sam."

"Do you think, sir, that he was in the secret?"

"Yes, or it could never have been carried out to such a successful termination."

"Then the lady who was here as his sister must have been the fair plotter."

"Yes, Colonel De Sutro, she and no one else; but, I cannot believe that it was intended by her that a life should be taken in this escape."

"That is why I say it was so cleverly planned, in Chicago, not here, and money obtained those letter-heads, the use of the state seal and the forgery of those papers."

"She is a very remarkable woman, Colonel Dunwoody."

"Yes, Lester, she is; but humane as well as clever and daring."

"She has planned, too, that her brother should make no mistake in escaping, and so I am sure that Buffalo Bill and those he guides are following a blind trail."

"Where is the woman now, sir?"

"The lady, Colonel De Sutro, for she is such and cannot be censured for saving her brother, has gone East, I believe."

"At least such was her intention."

"And Miss Carr does not know her address, major?" asked Colonel De Sutro, who was always envious of Clarice Carr's receiving more attention than Nina, and was willing to give a little dig at the major, in return for the colonel's rebuke to him for calling Ruth Arden a woman.

"Miss Arden has promised to write to Miss Carr, Colonel De Sutro, yet has not done so thus far."

"With Colonel Dunwoody, I am not one to cast the slightest censure upon her for wishing to save her wicked brother from the gallows, and I admire her pluck, but only hope Powell has not been a sufferer by it."

## CHAPTER LXI.

### THE VOLUNTEER.

"I most sincerely echo your hope, Lester, that Powell has come to no harm by this escape," said Colonel Dunwoody, and Colonel De Sutro expressed the same wish.

After some further conversation upon the subject it was decided that the letter should be at once written and dispatched by courier, in order to get a response from the general as soon as possible.

Then, while Colonel Dunwoody was writing the letter to General S— it occurred to Major Lester to volunteer to himself go on after Captain Caruth's command and explain the situation to that officer and to Buffalo Bill.

When he mentioned to the general his determination, his services were gladly accepted and he at once repaired to his quarters to make preparations for the night ride, and an order was sent for an escort of a sergeant and eight troopers, with a scout as guide.

The courier was dispatched with the letter to the general, to be taken to a point on the Overland Trail where there was a tri-weekly mail going East, and a scout was the bearer, a man thoroughly acquainted with the country so that he could make the best time possible.

Soon after Major Lester and his escort rode out of the fort and at a trot started upon the trail.

They had gone prepared to push on by night, for several lanterns had been taken along, and these were put into requisition upon reaching Deep Dell Brook.

The trail was thus readily followed from there, and just at sunrise the party came to the camp of the troop ahead, and which had been deserted a couple of hours before.

A halt was made of an hour for rest and breakfast, and then they pushed on again.

The scout with the escort was a good one, and he followed the trail readily, gaining here and there by cutting across country, from his knowledge of which way the trail must lead.

In this way, by noon, a gain of several miles had been made simply by being saved, and Major Lester felt cheered with the hope of closing up with the party ahead before nightfall.

A long rest was taken at noon, for both men and horses needed it, and then the trail was resumed once more.



When the sun was nearing the horizon the scout desisted ahead a camp-fire.

He at once halted and reported it, and soon after the escort rode into the camp of Captain Caruth's troop.

"Well, Lester, what on earth brings you here?" cried Captain Caruth.

"Has aught gone wrong at the fort?"

"Come aside and I will tell you."

"Where is Buffalo Bill?"

"Asleep yonder at my camp."

"We will go there then."

"Your manner indicates that something is wrong."

"There is."

"Have you made any discovery?"

"Buffalo Bill has."

"What?"

"Well, he was on ahead and we came upon him here."

"He has been going all the time and at last even his iron frame had to acknowledge fatigue, and he halted here, while his scouts have gone off on the seven different trails that lead from yonder valley in as many different directions."

"Ho, Cody, here is Major Lester, and he has news for us."

Buffalo Bill was asleep upon his blanket, but sprung to his feet in an instant and said:

"Glad to see you, major."

"Hope nothing has gone wrong at the fort to bring you after us, sir."

"There is something very wrong, Bill, as you shall know, for I wish to tell the major and yourself at once."

Then the major went on to tell the captain and the scout of the letters brought by the courier, and just what the general had done.

Buffalo Bill gave a low whistle, and the captain laughed.

"Well, Bill, what do you think of it?" asked Captain Caruth.

"I think that Miss Arden is a dandy, sir, for it's her work, sure as can be."

"You are right, she did the work and she is a dandy."

"She has outwitted a fort full of soldiers, from colonel down, and she has serenely gone her way beyond harm herself," said Captain Caruth.

"Yes, it is the belief of the colonel also that Miss Arden did the planning, and from what I know of her she is capable of it," Major Lester said.

"But where is she now?" the captain asked.

"Ask the winds, Caruth," said the major, and then he added:

"And, Bill, where is Silk Lasso Sam?"

"I surrender, sir."

"Explain, please."

"Well, sir, I followed the trail to the point down the valley there, and from the creek it divided into just seven trails."

"All going the same way?"

"No, sir, going off like the fingers from your hand."

"I followed just one, then the other, and then gave it up and waited for the coming of Captain Caruth and my scouts."

"I sent two men off on each trail, for I borrowed a soldier or two from Captain Caruth, and I turned in to rest, sir."

"Then you delay here until you get the reports from your scouts?"

"Yes, sir."

"That is all that I can see to do, Lester."

"Yes, Caruth, you can do nothing else but wait," was the major's reply.

## CHAPTER LXII.

### TREACHERY.

THE coach that carried the prisoner away from the fort progressed on its way until it neared Deep Dell Brook.

Then Detective Raymond called out to the driver that the prisoner was not feeling very well, and he would like to give him a seat on top of the coach.

This was allowed and a seat was arranged behind Surgeon Powell and Horseshoe Ned.

Then on the coach went once more.

Neither Horseshoe Ned or Surgeon Powell suspected treachery from behind them.

They were prepared to resist any attempt at the rescue of the prisoner, should the coach be held up on the way.

But behind the surgeon and the driver was a plot going on.

The prisoner's irons were quietly unlocked

by Detective Raymond, and he was a free man.

Then, at a given signal, the two suddenly brought a revolver down upon the head of the man immediately in the front of each.

The coach was just moving out of Deep Dell Brook at the time.

The blows were stunning ones, and that one delivered by the detective upon the head of the driver a very severe one, for it cut to the bone, and was given with an indifference as to whether it killed or not.

The blow received by the Surgeon Scout was less severe, perhaps because the benumbed hands of the outlaw chief were not able to strike so hard, perhaps because the man admired Frank Powell as he had said that he did.

Horseshoe Ned fell heavily from his box to the ground, and the team stopped.

Surgeon Powell also reeled, clutched at his revolver, and turning, fired.

His shot killed the pretended Detective Raymond, though he received a bullet himself in the shoulder, and dropped from the coach to the ground.

Half-stunned as he was by the blow, and wounded, too, while the fall gave him a severe shock, he was no match for the outlaw chief, and the two men who leaped from the coach upon him.

He was quickly secured, disarmed, and the manacles taken from Silk Lasso Sam were put upon him.

There were others who had appeared upon the scene during this unequal combat.

They were two men who quickly looked about for Raymond, but found him dead.

Then they turned to the chief and said that they had been ordered to that point to meet him, and had horses near.

The chief, aided by one of the pretended detectives, assisted Surgeon Powell along the bank to where the horses awaited them, the other men following soon after, with the booty taken from the coach, which they reported leaving when it had been halted in the trail, and with Horseshoe Ned, as they said, dead near it, and the body of Raymond they had placed inside.

Surgeon Powell appeared half dazed from his blow, but he made no resistance and was mounted upon one of the horses that was there.

"You must go with me, Surgeon Powell, for I do not wish to kill you, and you are too dangerous a man to leave behind," said the chief.

Frank Powell made no reply and mounting, the chief, his prisoner and four men set off down the valley.

The wound of the surgeon was looked to at the first halt made, and it was found not to be dangerous though severe.

On they went until after noon, when the chief said:

"I wish to divide here."

"You have your pay, men, for the work you have done, so go your separate ways, and I will go mine, taking my prisoner with me."

"The odd horses we will turn loose, and that there may be seven separate trails going in as many directions, I will go on foot and the surgeon can ride the horse I had."

Thus the men parted on the trail, the Surgeon Scout mounted on the best horse, which was led by Silk Lasso Sam.

The outlaw chief appeared to have a direct purpose in view, and to know the country thoroughly, for he kept steadily on, the Surgeon Scout seemingly indifferent to what was going on.

Toward sunset he came to a good spot for a camp and was just coming to a halt when a horse and rider appeared in sight.

The chief started and dropped his hand upon his revolver, as though to stand at bay when the Surgeon Scout said sternly:

"Hold! do not fire upon a woman."

"My God, I had nearly done so, for I could hardly see her through the foliage."

"It is your sister."

"Yes."

The outlaw gave a call, and the horse-woman who had not seen them up to that time came quickly toward them.

"Ruth!"

"Brother!"

The rider had thrown herself from her horse and was clasped in her brother's arms, while she cried:

"You are free, and now you will remember your pledge to me to lead a different life."

"I will keep my word to you, Ruth."

"But see, here is an old friend, and he is wounded and suffering."

"Surgeon Powell!" cried Ruth, her face turning white, and then wheeling upon her brother she demanded sternly:

"What does this mean, sir?"

## CHAPTER LXIII.

### THE GOOD SAMARITAN.

THE eyes of Ruth flashed fire as she turned them upon her brother, whose face flushed under her gaze, while he said in an embarrassed manner:

"Do not be angry, Ruth, for no harm has been done, or very little at least, for the surgeon is not much hurt."

"I wish to say to you, Surgeon Powell," and Ruth turned toward him, "that I planned the escape of my brother from the gallows."

"I went to Chicago, got forged documents and sent these men in my pay to play the detective and bring my brother away."

"I was to have horses meet them at Deep Dell Brook, and it seems that so far as his escape is concerned all went well."

"In consideration for his escape he had pledged me to lead a different life, to reform."

"Now, when I supposed that there would be no trouble in his making his escape, no bloodshed, he appears here, when I come to meet him, with you in irons and a prisoner."

"I ask you, Surgeon Powell, what does it mean?"

"Let your brother inform you, Miss Arden," was the reply of Frank Powell.

"Well, sir, what explanation have you to offer for this outrage upon Surgeon Powell?"

"I wish to say, Ruth, that you are angry without a cause."

"Colonel Dunwoody sent Surgeon Powell along also, and there was but one way to escape, if I was to do so."

"The man Raymond dealt Horseshoe Ned a severe blow, and I struck the surgeon, but not to do him other harm than stun him."

"The driver, I fear, was killed, for he fell from the box, while Surgeon Powell turned, drew his revolver and fired upon Raymond, who also drew trigger at the same time."

"The Surgeon killed Raymond, and you see that Doctor Powell received a slight wound in the shoulder."

"There was nothing to be done then but to make Surgeon Powell a prisoner and bring him along."

"I discovered the men back in the valley and we were upon our way to Pocket City, where I knew that you would do all in your power for the doctor."

"Gladly I will, and it is but seven miles to Pocket City, and we will go on at once."

"But there should have been no bloodshed in this escape, brother, for I meant that it should be a rescue wholly by strategy."

"Come, Surgeon Powell, you are no prisoner, so, brother, unlock those irons."

"And have him kill me?"

"I shall take the parole of both of you to do no harm to each other."

"Will you give it, Surgeon Powell?"

"As you ask it, Miss Arden, I will."

"And you, brother?"

"I will only protect my life," was the guarded answer of the outlaw.

"Then give me the key of these manacles."

They were handed to her, and the irons were unlocked and thrown over the horn of the saddle.

"Now, Doctor Powell, I desire to get you to a place of safety as soon as possible and see what can be done for you."

"Brother, my horse is fresh and able to carry double, so mount behind me."

This the outlaw did and she rode on through the gathering darkness.

Arriving in the vicinity of Hangman's Gulch, Ruth paused and said:

"Brother, you know that it will not do for you to be seen, and I have a hiding-place for you, where you can be safe until you have an opportunity of leaving this country."

"You have no fear of Hangman's Gulch, so remain here until I return for you later, for now I shall go on with Major Powell to the hotel."

The outlaw made no reply and obeyed,



and Ruth rode on with Surgeon Powell by her side.

Soon after he found himself in pleasant quarters, and his wounds were skillfully dressed by the fair hands of the good Samaritan who once more appeared in her character of Bonnie Belle.

#### CHAPTER LXIV.

##### A SISTER'S LOVE.

WHEN Ruth had seen Surgeon Powell in comfortable quarters at The Frying Pan, she mounted her horse and rode alone out of Pocket City.

There were few miners abroad at that hour, and if any one saw her at all they supposed in the darkness that she was a man.

Even had they known it to be Bonnie Belle she would have gone unquestioned as to the cause of her late ride, no matter how much any one would have wondered as to the reason.

She rode directly toward Hangman's Gulch, and that was a sure sign that she would meet no one on that trail, which the bravest of the miners would not travel by night.

And yet there in that weird spot, among the graves of a score of victims of border justice or injustice, as the case might be, with the gallows rising above him, stood a man then under sentence of death to die by hanging.

A man who could count his victims by the score, a man revengeful, merciless and wicked far beyond his kind.

It was Arden Leigh, known on the frontier as Silk Lasso Sam.

He had been left there by his devoted sister to await her return, and if the spot had haunting memories for him he did not reveal the fact by word or deed.

In fact he was rather more callous it seemed, than touched by the memories which the place must bring up to one who was such as he.

He uttered an impatient oath now and then, as time passed on and he did not hear his sister returning, and at last, losing his patience as time stole on, he was moving down toward the mouth of the gulch, when his ears caught the clatter of hoof-falls.

"She is coming," he muttered.

Then, as he darted back into the shadow, he drew a revolver and said:

"But I must not be too sure."

Soon a horse and rider appeared in the gulch, and drawing rein, those near heard the soft, plaintive notes of the whip-poor-will.

"My God! how that call carries me back to the past, for it was my call for Ruth," and the man seemed to feel for an instant a pang of memory and remorse that overwhelmed him.

Then, as the call was repeated again and again he stepped out from the shadow and approached the maiden where she sat upon her horse.

"Ah, brother, I am so glad to find you, for I was becoming anxious at not finding you," she said, as she slipped from her saddle to the ground.

"I was so taken aback at the old whip-poor-will call, Ruth, that I could neither answer it, or speak."

"I was overwhelmed for a moment."

"It was your call for me, when I was a little girl, Arden."

"Yes, and that is what impressed me so."

"Then you can feel, and you are not, as people have said, utterly heartless and callous?"

"I hope I am a changed man, my sister."

"But what am I to do?"

"You are to return with me to Pocket City, for I have a place in my wing of the hotel where I can hide and care for you for a few days, as it would by no means be safe for you to attempt now to go through the country alone."

"And why not now?"

"Because you know that your attack on Surgeon Powell will cause the wildest excitement at the fort."

"Of course it will be known that you escaped, and Colonel Dunwoody will have half his force on your track, for Surgeon Powell will be supposed to have been killed, and that will make those who search for him most revengeful."

"That is so, sister."

"I am sorry that this was not an escape without violence, and, as I fear, the death of the driver."

"How could it be without violence or death with the Surgeon Scout along, Ruth, for you know it would have been easier to have mastered a guard of half a dozen men than Powell, unless by a blow when he did not expect it."

"He is an extraordinary man, you know."

"Yes, he is, and I am glad it is no worse."

"But now here are some things for you to put on and you are to come with me to Pocket City."

"I will ride on ahead and enter my wing of the hotel, and when you hear the whip-poor-will cry do you then come directly to my gate in the stockade wall."

"I understand."

"I will have your room ready, and will bring you your food myself, while I am arranging for your departure."

"You are most kind to me, Ruth."

"But then you always have been."

"I wish to be, and I hope to help you to lead a different life, my brother."

"You alone can do it, Ruth," was the low response, and then, as though he dreaded trouble yet for himself he said:

"What you say about Powell alarms me, and if it is found out that you are my sister, then your house will be searched, Ruth."

"Let them search it, for they will never find you in the place where I can hide you, Arden."

"All right, I am in your hands, my sister," and having slipped on the clothes she had brought him, he followed her on to the edge of Pocket City.

For half an hour he waited there in the shadow of the timber, and then came the cry of the night bird, when he walked briskly toward the stockade.

The gate was opened, and unseen by any one he entered and had reached a haven of refuge.

#### CHAPTER LXV.

##### THE SURGEON SCOUT GIVES A WARNING.

FRANK POWELL'S wounds were painful, though not serious.

He had been taken to one of the pleasantest rooms in the border shanty known as The Frying Pan, and thither went Bonnie Belle and a Chinnee servant, with water, arnica and bandages.

"I have come to dress your wounds, Surgeon Powell, under your direction," she said with a smile.

"They amount to but little to one who has roughed it as I have, Miss Arden."

"There, you are calling me Miss Arden, when you know that here I am Bonnie Belle."

"I will not mistake again, Bonnie Belle."

"Here, Chin-Chin, get ready to help me," and having placed the basin and other things upon the table she drew back the collar of the surgeon's shirt and glanced at the wound.

"What do you think of it?" she asked.

"The bullet passed through, and touched no bones, so it will soon heal," he assured.

She then bathed the two wounds where the bullet cut its way in and out and bandaged the shoulder firmly.

"Now to that cut upon the head."

The blow had cut to the bone, but the skull was not injured, and being washed clean she took a couple of stitches drawing it together, after which it was also dressed carefully.

Chin-Chin, meanwhile, was sent for some supper for the Surgeon Scout, who ate heartily of what was brought to him, and, left to himself, was soon after sound asleep.

The next day Bonnie Belle visited him with Chin-Chin, again dressed his wounds and then said:

"Now, Surgeon Powell, I have written a letter to the fort that you are here, and I suppose a troop will soon be sent for you."

"Yes, but there was no need of it, as I could have gone on alone."

"No, sir, that I would not allow, for brave and strong as you are you are not able to take that ride alone, so you are to remain here until your comrades come for you."

"You are the captain, Bonnie Belle, and so I obey."

"But, I have something to say to you."

"Well, sir?"

"You do not know that Buffalo Bill is on my trail."

She started and asked:

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that Buffalo Bill was to follow the coach to the end of the run."

"He did not say as much, but I feel sure that he did so."

"Yes."

"Of course he came upon the scene where the coach had been held up, and where were the bodies of the rescuer and of Horse shoe Ned, if the latter was killed, which I doubt."

"I think I see your meaning now."

"Yes, for Buffalo Bill coming upon this scene read it like an open book."

"He returned to the fort and got a force with which to follow the rescuers, and he did so with all the promptness for which he is famous."

"That is the way I read it, anyhow."

"And that means that he will come here?"

"Yes, and very soon."

"But, my brother guarded against that by dividing the men, as you know, and covering up the trails as well as he could."

"Your brother did not guard against the fact that Buffalo Bill was upon his trail."

"He supposed that it would, perhaps, be a couple of days before the rescue was known, and so the trails would be in a manner stale before there would be any one on his track."

"What became of his rescuers he doubtless did not care, so long as he reached you in safety and found a hiding place."

"I fear such is the nature of my brother, Doctor Powell."

"I merely judge him by his actions in the past, and though I feel that he deserves hanging, and should be hanged without any hesitation if taken, as he will surely be, for your sake I give you this warning."

"It is most kind of you."

"No, it is just to you, for I feel that you are here, living the life you do, only to save your brother, to redeem him."

"You have played a bold game for his rescue, and as you believe in his reformation, as he has pledged himself to lead a different life, I shall not be the one to thwart you, so give you a warning that if Buffalo Bill comes here with his scouts, as he surely will, he will ferret out the hiding-place of your brother and you will see him hanged before your eyes, I very much fear."

"Then you would advise me to at once remove him to a safe retreat?" anxiously asked Bonnie Belle.

"I would advise you to send him far from here at once, Bonnie Belle."

"If he goes back to his old ways of wickedness again, then you have done far more than your duty by him and he must take the consequences."

"Yes, it must be so," she said sadly, and then, as she turned from the room she continued:

"I thank you, Surgeon Powell; and I will at once take your advice."

"I may have done wrong, but it was in justice to that noble girl," muttered the Surgeon Scout, when left alone.

#### CHAPTER LXVI.

##### THE OUTLAW'S PLEDGE.

FROM the room of the Surgeon Scout Bonnie Belle went with very thoughtful face to her room.

She soon made her arrangements for bringing the outlaw to her own quarters, for she could do nothing else.

That she did so the reader has seen.

Then she looked the situation squarely in the face and decided to speak and act at once.

Delays are dangerous she was well aware, and with Buffalo Bill upon the trail of her brother she understood just what it meant.

So she said, after some time spent in silent thought:

"Brother, I wish to talk with you."

"I am very tired, sis, so say another time."

"No, it must be now for I have something to tell you that will startle you."

"Well?"

"Buffalo Bill is upon your trail."



"Hal  
"How know you this?"  
"From the Surgeon Scout."  
"Bah! he has tried to frighten you."  
"And has been successful."  
"You are frightened then?"  
"I am."  
"And I am not."  
"Well, we shall see what cause you have."  
"Fire away."  
"The Surgeon Scout did not try to frighten me."  
"What then?"  
"He did me a kindness, as, after all I had risked and done for you he did not wish me to see you hanged."  
"He is very kind."  
There was a sneer in the man's tones.  
"You misunderstand him, as I will prove to you."  
"He told me that he had been sent East by Colonel Dunwoody under orders, and that fearful of an attack upon the coach, to rescue you, for my men were not suspected of being treacherous, except that they might be bribed to release you, detectives though they were supposed to be, Buffalo Bill had decided to follow the coach, and did so."  
"Ah!"  
"He therefore came upon the scene and of course rode back to the fort for aid."  
"This looks bad, if true."  
"It is true, for Surgeon Powell told me for my good, with the hope that you might have a chance to prove to me that your reformation was sincere."  
The outlaw wore a troubled look now, for he knew what Buffalo Bill was on a trail.  
"Well, Ruth, what is to be done?"  
"If you remain here, knowing as he does that you are my brother, Buffalo Bill will prevent your escape, for he will put spies upon this hotel and you will be captured when you least expect it."  
"It looks bad for me, sis."  
"Yes, unless you go at once from here."  
"How can I?"  
"I will go to the stable and get my best horse for you, yes, two of them, for one you can use as a pack-animal."  
"I will fit you up a disguise, some provisions to last you a week or more, your weapons you can get together, and when all is in readiness you can meet me at the cliff on the trail to Hangman's Gulch."  
"That trail is well traveled, and you can take the bed of the stream then, following down it for miles."  
"This will destroy any trail, for I will drag back a bush over the trail of the horses to the stream, leaving a rope to it as though a horse had been hitched to it and then broke away."  
"You are as ingenious as Buffalo Bill, sis."  
"When we are working for a life our brains are on the alert, brother."  
"Now, you get the provisions, blankets, ammunition and weapons packed up, for I will bring them to you with the pack-saddle at once, and I will see to the horses going to the edge of the timber."  
"You will have to carry the pack-saddle that far yourself, but the other horse will be all saddled and bridled ready for you."  
"I will not mind it, Ruth; but I want the best animals you have."  
"You shall have them."  
"And you know that I have no money."  
"Indeed?"  
"It is so."  
"I heard that you had been allowed to keep what you had on you of value when taken."  
"It is not so, for I was robbed of everything," said the outlaw with ready lie, for he had then upon him some gold, paper money and valuables to the amount of ten thousand dollars.  
"Well, brother, I am not sorry, for that which you had had been gained dishonorably, and would have brought you bad luck."  
"I will give you ten thousand dollars in bills, which you can carry easily, and when I know in the future, that you have reformed, that you have atoned for the past all that lies within your power, then will I share with you the fortune that I possess."  
"You are very kind to me, Ruth; but I believe if I had more money now I could invest it so well that you would not have to give me a cent."  
"I cannot give you more now, brother;

but should you need it, you know where I told you to write to me, and I will readily help you."  
"But have you decided where you will go?"  
"Yes, I shall go to South America somewhere and invest my money there."  
"Well, may success attend you, brother, wherever you go."  
"But now I have to ask a favor of you."  
"Granted."  
"Here is our mother's prayer-book and in it is a lock of her hair."  
"Will you clasp this sacred book in your hand, grasp mine with the other, and solemnly vow to me your pledge of reformation of your life and atonement for your past sins as far as is within your power to do so?"  
A cloud swept over the face of the outlaw but he answered:  
"I will."  
She placed the prayer-book in his left hand, grasped his right in both her own and then repeated the pledge she wished him to make to her.  
His voice quivered as he repeated it after her, but he kept on to the end, and then she said:  
"Brother Arden, I have perfect faith in you now that you will keep your pledge to me."  
"Now I must hasten to get you away under cover of the darkness."  
And half an hour after the devoted sister parted from her outlaw brother at the little stream, she returning to the camps dragging after her a cedar bush to wipe out the trails of the two horses she had led to that spot to await his coming.  
And once more a free man, Arden Leigh was launched again upon the world, no longer known as Silk Lasso Sam the outlaw.

CHAPTER LXVII.  
CONCLUSION.

THE scouts under Buffalo Bill came into camp the following day after starting upon the trails, two of them with horses which they had found astray in the timber, and two more with a prisoner they had taken.  
Two others reported having killed a man whom they overtook and who showed fight, and thus were the pretended detectives, the comrades of Raymond, accounted for.  
Texas Jack had the best story to tell however.  
He had tracked a horse down toward Pocket City and discovered that there was a man on foot going along that way too.  
He had trailed them to a spot half a dozen miles from Yellow Dust Valley, and there a horse had joined them as the tracks showed.  
This horse came from the direction of Yellow Dust Valley.  
"That is the trail we take, Captain Caruth, and I am going to ask you to camp your men outside of Pocket City, and you and the major go on with me alone," said Buffalo Bill.  
"You will discover my reason later, and, if I mistake not we will find Surgeon Powell in Pocket City, for I cannot believe that harm has befallen him."  
So the command moved on its way, and Buffalo Bill guided them to the camping place near the cabin of Deadshot Dean.  
It was night then, and accompanied by Major Lester and Captain Caruth, Buffalo Bill rode on into Pocket City and halted at The Frying Pan.  
But for the warning given by the Surgeon Scout, it would have been to the great surprise of Bonnie Belle, as she came out of her rooms, to be suddenly confronted by the tall form of the scout, and to see behind him the two officers in uniform.  
The scout acted as spokesman and said:  
"Bonnie Belle, we are here to find Surgeon Powell, and I feel that you will give what information you can regarding him."  
"Then you missed my courier to the fort, sent this morning?"  
"We saw no courier."  
"I sent to the fort a letter to Colonel Dunwoody explaining all, and— But why this disguise any longer, for I see that Major Lester and Captain Caruth both know me now as Miss Arden, but here alone remember I must be only Bonnie Belle."  
"Come into my rooms and I will tell you all there is to tell, while, to relieve your

minds, let me say that Surgeon Powell is here and doing well, though he is wounded."  
"I will explain, however."  
And then she told the story of her bold rescue of her brother, and which had been intended to be a bloodless one, as far as she was concerned.  
Surgeon Powell was sent for and was able to come to her rooms to meet his comrades, and a pleasant meeting it was.  
"And now, Bonnie Belle, I desire to ask you one question," said Buffalo Bill.  
"Certainly."  
"Where is your brother?"  
"Far from here, for he was set free upon conditions."  
"I have kept my contract with him, and with a handsome sum of money, he has gone, to appear amid these scenes no more."  
"As for myself, I shall start East upon the next coach going out, to escape punishment from Colonel Dunwoody, and also to visit the family of Deadshot Dean, near my old girlhood home."  
Until a late hour they all talked together, and the next morning, as Surgeon Powell expressed himself as well able for the journey, the return march was begun.  
Arriving there they found that Colonel Dunwoody had received the letter written him by Ruth, and to Surgeon Powell he said, confidentially:  
"One of these days I will ask that woman to be my wife, Powell, for she is as noble a specimen of womanhood as I ever knew, or heard of."  
"The letter she wrote me was a confession of why she had so cleverly deceived us all here, in her rescue of her brother, and begged that I would understand that her motive was to save him that he might not die unrepentant."  
"She has been on this border now, as the landlady of a hotel and a gambling den, and yet I believe that she is pure as an angel."  
"And I would stake life, honor, all I hold dear on earth, Colonel Dunwoody, upon her, for she is all that you say that she is," was Frank Powell's response, and then he told the colonel all that had occurred at the time of his being taken to the hotel.  
"Do you not believe he will change his evil career, Powell, as he has pledged himself to do?" asked the colonel.  
"Pardon me, sir, if I say that I believe he is too steeped in sin ever to be other than a wicked man."  
"All that he is, or yet may be, Powell, does not however alter my regard for his sister one jot or tittle."  
"Nor mine, sir, and Buffalo Bill feels the same way, for he has said as much."  
"And where is the fellow?"  
"He has gone to Mexico, sir, I take it, from what his sister said, and that is a very bad country for a man of his caliber to go to, to reform."  
"It is indeed, Surgeon Powell," was the answer of the colonel, who then added:  
"But I tell you in confidence that one of these days I shall seek out that young girl and offer her my hand and heart."  
And Colonel Dunwoody was as good as his word, and he did not ask in vain for the hand and heart of the real of his ideal love, though then she was no longer known as Bonnie Belle of Pocket City, but as Miss Ruth Leigh, a belle and beauty in society, and one known to possess a very large fortune of which she was the sole mistress.  
And there was in the fort another happy couple in Clarice Carr and Captain Dick Caruth, whose lives also had a secret romance in them.  
As for Nina De Sutro, with a heart warped by her sorrows, the wrecking of her life in girlhood by the outlaw who had crossed her path, she in the end sought a haven of refuge within the walls of a Mexican convent, hiding her life and her beautiful face under the veil of a nun.  
The two heroes of the plains, who have been mainly the heroes of my romance, the Surgeon Scout, Frank Powell, and the king of scouts, Buffalo Bill, are to-day men whose names are read almost daily in story and verse, and that they may yet be spared to lives of usefulness, to enjoy for many years the honors they have won in their heroic deeds upon the frontier, is, I know, the warmest wish of my kind readers.

THE END.



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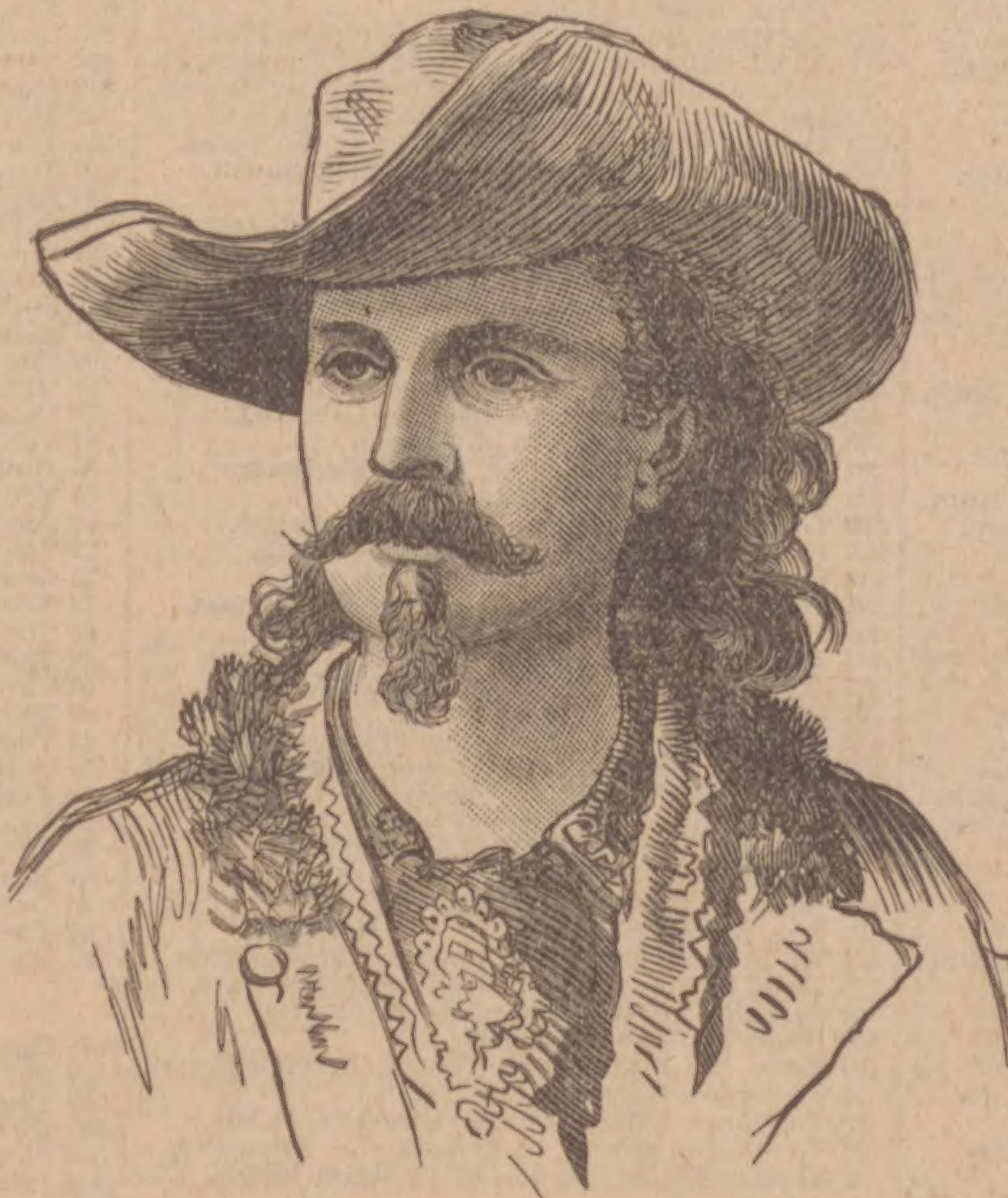
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